11 Hg

THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH,

THE TRUE KEY

TO THE RIGHT UNDERSTANDING

OF THE

Moſt difficult Paſſages in the New Teſtament,

AND PARTICULARLY

IN THE EVANGELISTS.

OR,

A moſt intereſting View of ſome

IMPORTANT INTERNAL EVIDENCES

OF THE

TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY,

Drawn from Hiſtorical Facts.

IN

ANSWER TO SOME OBJECTIONS

OF THE HISTORIAN OF THE DECLINE AND FALL OF

THE ROMAN EMPIRE,

And of the learned Dr. THOMAS EDWARDS.

Θεμέλιον γὰρ ἄλλον ἐδεὶς δύναται θεῖναι παρὰ τὸν κείμενον, ὅς ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστός.—1. COR. iii. 11.

By N. NISBETT, M. A.

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Preface to the Reader.

THE calamitous ſtate of the times—the extreme indifference to diſquiſitions of a religious nature, ſo manifeſtly prevalent in the preſent age—and the neceſſity the Author of the following work has been under of differing in opinion from the firſt literary characters, it is poſſible may operate much to its prejudice; but the ſubject, in the Author's eſtimation, is of ſufficient importance to run ſome riſque. As the beſt intereſts of ſociety are deeply concerned in the cordial reception of Chriſtianity, any attempt to clear it of what is allowed on all hands to

be the moſt ſerious difficulties, and to render it more worthy of the attention of mankind, will not, it is hoped, want encouragement from the diſcerning and the virtuous part of mankind!

The Author's attention to the ſubject of the enſuing pages originated in a private converſation with a much reſpected Clergyman with whom he has the honor to be acquainted, as far back as the year 1786, and in the year following he publiſhed his firſt work entitled *An Attempt to Illuſtrate various important Paſſages of Scripture, &c.* and in the year 1789 he again publiſhed *An Illuſtration of various important Paſſages in the Epiſtles, &c.* which attracted the attention of Dr. Thomas Edwards, in a Sermon delivered from the Univerſity pulpit at Cambridge, which again induced the

the Author to review the ſubject, and to publiſh his *Scripture Doctrine concerning the Coming of Chriſt*, in which the objections of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, and of the learned Univerſity Preacher, are conſidered; but not with that fulneſs and perſpicuity which, on farther conſideration, was ſatisfactory to the Author's own mind.

It was not the Author's intention to have troubled the public with any thing more upon the ſubject, till, in the early part of the laſt year, he was animated to a reconſideration of the ſubject, by the information that his firſt work was ſo well received in Germany, as to be tranſlated into the language of that country, by the learned Mr. Dillinger, firſt Miniſter of Nuremberg. To this learned German, therefore, the public

public is indebted, if it ſhould be found worthy of their attention, for the preſent work, which is preſented to the Reader as the great outline of the Scripture Doctrine of *the Coming of Chriſt*, which may the more eaſily be filled up by future Enquirers, if that outline ſhall be found to be accurate!

It was the Author's intention to have availed himſelf of the large notes of his learned Tranſlator, in his preſent publication---but he was unable to procure a copy of it till it was very forward in the preſs, and ſubſequent diſappointments have obliged him to deny himſelf and the public that gratification. Should the Work be favorably received, and another edition be called for, he will gladly diſcharge to his *unknown friend*, the pleaſing tribute of gratitude which is due to him.

Having

Having thus ſtated to the Reader the origin of the preſent Publication, the Author begs leave, with all deference and reſpect, to ſay a few words upon the deſultory mode, too commonly adopted, of treating the Sacred Writings, and to point out what appears to him to be the moſt effectual method of ſtudying them to advantage. It is greatly to be regretted, that Writers of all deſcriptions have been too little ſolicitous to aſcertain, with preciſion, the true meaning of thoſe paſſages of Scripture which they have had occaſion to quote, in defence of the opinions which they have eſpouſed; which, if inveſtigated with a cloſe attention to their connection, would frequently be found to have no relation to the ſubject which they were intended to ſupport. In compoſitions which are purely practical, if any

any ſuch there be, ſome licence may *perhaps* be allowed; but where paſſages of Scripture are quoted for the expreſs purpoſe of proving any doctrine, or opinion, ſuppoſed to be contained in the Scriptures, too much care moſt certainly cannot be taken, in aſcertaining their preciſe meaning, otherwiſe they not only ceaſe to be of any authority, but muſt have an unfriendly influence upon the intereſts of Chriſtianity. Such looſe quotations have undoubtedly been the chief ſource of error, and of the ſlow progreſs of truth!

But how, it will be aſked, is the true ſenſe of Scripture to be aſcertained, and ſuch a looſe quotation of Scripture to be avoided? The preſent ſtate of the Chriſtian world affords a demonſtrable, and, indeed, a melancholy evidence of the vaſt importance of theſe queſtions; and, until

until they ſhall be decided, with ſome degree of accuracy, religious controverſies, upon ſubjects as wide from each other as the poles, will continue to ſubſiſt, and will have little better influence upon the diſcerning part of mankind, than to fatigue and diſguſt them, and, what is ſtill worſe, to perpetuate thoſe animoſities and party diſputes which are, and muſt be, ſo far as they prevail, the bane of all Religion.

It is fully admitted, by all denominations of Proteſtants, that there is no common judge of controverſy, to whom an appeal can be made to diſtinguiſh Truth from Error. The Bible---the Bible, one and all, with the great Chillingworth, will ſay, is the Religion of Proteſtants; but in their appeals to that Bible, how various and how multiplied are the opinions, not of the

the Enthuſiaſt, or of the viſionary only---but of the moſt ſenſible and the moſt enlightened part of mankind. Is this owing to a defect of clearneſs and perſpicuity in the Sacred Writings, or to a wrong method of ſtudying them?

If there is any one ſubject in the New Teſtament of greater difficulty than another, it is the Doctrine of *the Coming of Chriſt*, which is the ſubject of the enſuing pages, and which has hitherto baffled the greateſt ſkill, ſatisfactorily to explain.—But, if what has been here advanced upon the ſubject, ſhall be found upon examination to be juſt and accurate; it will be evident to a demonſtration that a defect of clearneſs and perſpicuity is not juſtly to be charged to the ſacred writers—but to an unaccountable inattention to them *as Hiſtorians*. The advantages which the

the Author has experienced in obviating the objections of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and fall of the Roman Empire, upon this ſubject—in aſcertaining with preciſion, the meaning of many other paſſages in the Evangeliſts—and particularly the xxivth of St. Matthew and the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke, by conſidering them in this light, and by giving the cloſeſt attention to the prejudices and ſentiments of the perſons who are the ſubjects of thoſe hiſtories, ſtrongly incline him to think that a like undeviating attention to them *as Hiſtorians* would lay a ſolid foundation for removing obſcurities, and for obtaining a more accurate knowledge of the genuine and unadulterated principles of Chriſtianity. Happy will the Author think himſelf if his preſent work ſhall, in any degree con-

contribute to ſo deſirable an end; for he knows of no employment ſo worthy of a rational being as that of ſhowing it to the world, *as worthy of all acceptation!*

The Author cannot conclude without returning his ſincere thanks to thoſe few ſubſcribers who have honoured his work with their patronage, without which he could not have thought himſelf juſtified in offering it to the public.

Aſh, Nov. 10, 1799.

ERRATA.

p. 8, line 1, dele *hitherto.*
p. 12, note, line 9, after *circumſtance of* add *his.*
pp. 17, 18, 37, and 132, for *riſe* read *deline.*
p. 87, ſupply *a* before *candleſtick.*
p. 216, line 24, for *Phriſees* read *Phariſees.*
p. 220, note, for *vol.* ii. read *vol.* iii.
p. 272, line 2, dele *a.*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH, THE TRUE KEY, &c.

WHEN Chriſtianity was firſt made known to the world, its divine Author delivered his Doctrines, and exhibited the proofs of his Miſſion, with unaffected ſimplicity. Satisfied of the intrinſic excellence of the one, and of the clearneſs and evidence of the other; he left them to produce their own effects upon the minds of his hearers, without attempting to illuſtrate that excellence, or to ſhew that thoſe proofs were proper and concluſive. The very intelligent and ingenious Dr. Gerard has, with great propriety, termed this, Our Lord's *original manner*; from which it does not appear that he ever deviated, but when Oppoſition made it neceſſary. When, however, Objections were formed againſt his Religion, he did not think it beneath the dignity of his Character to engage in its defence, and

to employ the powers of reaſoning, with a view to expoſe the weakneſs of thoſe Objections, and the unreaſonableneſs of an oppoſition to him: nor did he, in any one inſtance, expreſs the leaſt diſpleaſure at an inquiſitive turn of mind, when under the direction of a regard to truth. It was only when an inſidious and captious Spirit were too ſtrongly marked in their behaviour, to be miſtaken, that ſuch a conduct fell under his reprehenſion. So far indeed was Our Lord from requiring an implicit faith in his followers, that he directed them *to ſearch the Scriptures*, and to examine for themſelves, whether his doctrines were founded in truth, or were the fictions of Impoſture. The ſame liberality of Mind evidently actuated his Apoſtles in general, and particularly the Apoſtle Peter, when he directed the Chriſtian Converts among the Gentiles *to give a reaſon for the hope that was in them*, and *in the Spirit of meekneſs*, in oppoſition to a dogmatical and tyrannical ſpirit, *to inſtruct thoſe who oppoſed* the Chriſtian faith. As therefore a candid ſtatement of any Objections to Chriſtianity, moſt evidently, was not offenſive to Our Saviour himſelf, or to his more immediate Diſciples

and

and Apoſtles, it ought not to be diſpleaſing to any of its friends who come after them, from whatever quarter it may ariſe. It will from hence follow, that even the teachers of Chriſtianity, whoſe profeſſion leads them to conſider it, in every poſſible point of view in which it may be placed, may, without violating the duties of their profeſſion, ſometimes think it proper, and even neceſſary, to communicate their difficulties to the public, with a view to a more accurate and impartial inveſtigation.

Had Unbelievers confined their Attacks upon Chriſtianity within theſe juſt and reaſonable limits, the Authority and Example of its founder, and of his Apoſtles, would not only have juſtified the treating their Conſcientious ſcruples, with all poſſible deference and reſpect; but have laid its friends under an indiſpenſable Obligation of uſing their endeavours to ſolve their difficulties (for difficulties there are in all Sciences) with all the accuracy of which they were capable. But the ſmalleſt acquaintance with the Deiſtical Writers will ſhew, but too plainly, that they have often had other objects in view than the ſatisfying of conſcientious ſcruples, or the removal of

difficulties. Under the maſk of friendſhip for the cauſe of Chriſtianity, they have, not unfrequently, ſhewn their diſpoſition to undermine and to deſtroy its credit, and they have imperiouſly demanded conceſſions which they well knew, if granted, would effectually ruin its Intereſts, in the opinion of the diſcerning part of Mankind.

There is no Writer of this, or perhaps of any Age, who ſtands more remarkably diſtinguiſhed for this line of conduct, than Mr. Gibbon, the very celebrated Author of the Hiſtory of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. His great abillities—his extenſive knowledge, and his elegant pen, have eminently qualified him for becoming the Champion of Infidelity. And if he really believed Chriſtianity to be an Impoſture, his taking a decided part againſt it, ſo far from injuring his Character as a Man, would, upon his own principles, have been perfectly juſtifiable and praiſe worthy —nay, a ſacred duty which he owed to Truth and to the world. But to ſhelter himſelf under a profeſſion of Chriſtianity, and, at the ſame time to do all in his power to convict it of falſehood and impoſture, is, to ſay the leaſt, a conduct which is utterly un-

unworthy of the grave Hiſtorian, or the ingenuous ſearcher after Truth!

It were much to be wiſhed that, conſiſtently with a regard to truth, the learned Author of a Series of Diſcourſes, preached before the Univerſity of Cambridge, could have been exempted from this cenſure. His plan of pointing out, to the deliberate attention of the learned and judicious, ſuch Articles as appeared to him, of ſufficient importance to require a more accurate diſcuſſion than they have hitherto obtained, could not, if executed with impartiality, but have met with the approbation of the ſerious and rational Chriſtian, as well as that of the ſober infidel. A judicious ſtatement of the points in debate, between the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, and his Antagoniſts, and an accurate diſcrimination of the defects of the Advocates of the Chriſtian cauſe, could not but have had the beſt effects in promoting its moſt eſſential Intereſts. Such a ſtatement, before a learned body who were profeſſedly engaged in diſquiſitions of this nature, would have been made with ſingular propriety. But, it may ſurely be aſked—Was it neceſſary to the execution of this

plan, to involve in one general and indiſcriminate cenſure, the Advocates of Chriſtianity—to degrade, as low as poſſible, both them and their cauſe, and to repreſent the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, as inſulting and triumphing over his vanquiſhed enemies? Was it conſiſtent with the fairneſs and impartiality of a ſincere enquirer after truth to aſſert, that we ought not to entertain any ſanguine hopes of ſucceſs in obviating one of his principle Objections, becauſe the Advocates of Chriſtianity had hitherto failed in giving full ſatisfaction upon the ſubject? Was it, in fine, becoming the Character of the learned Univerſity Preacher, to adviſe an acquieſcence, in the ſolution of a difficulty which he himſelf is forced to acknowledge, may be treated with prophane deriſion, by the licentious Scoffer—or oppoſed with Argument, by the Sturdy Polemic; while he adds, with ſomething extremely like a ſneer, that it will be devoutly admitted by every pious Chriſtian, as proceeding from the Authority of an inſpired Apoſtle, and the beloved Diſciple of Jeſus? If Chriſtianity is to be believed on ſuch grounds, well may Infidels triumph—well

may

may they make it the ſubject of their profane deriſion! No one who thinks with the freedom of a Man, will heſitate to ſay, that if it becomes a queſtion whether the Intereſts of Chriſtianity would be more effectually promoted, by ſuch means, there will be any difficulty in forming a judgment concerning its nature. Whatever Ideas the learned Univerſity Preacher may have entertained upon the ſubject of the truth or falſehood of Chriſtianity—the inference will naturally and neceſſarily follow, from ſuch premiſes, whether he admits it, or not, that Chriſtianity is, what its Adverſaries would have us to believe it is, an IMPOSTURE.

But whatever imperfections or defects there may be in the manner of ſtating Objections againſt the truth of Chriſtianity, yet ſtill it is incumbent on its Advocates, if they would evince themſelves to be its genuine friends, to give the cloſeſt attention to thoſe objections, whenever they appear to have any real weight, and to examine them, with all the fairneſs and impartiality which truth demands. It is not meant, by this Obſervation, to inſinuate a want, either of zeal or of ability, in the friends of Chriſtianity, who have hitherto eſpouſed

its cauſe, or who have hitherto oppoſed the attacks of Infidelity. The numerous and able defences of our holy Religion, which adorn the Engliſh language, are, perhaps, unparalleled in any other Country! Yet in ſo extenſive a field of Controverſy, it will not be ſurpriſing if ſome topics have been leſs perfectly conſidered, than they may have deſerved. A watchful Adverſary, moſt aſſuredly, will not fail to point them out, and as the cauſe of Chriſtianity owes much of its preſent luſtre to the objections of former Writers on the ſide of Infidelity; ſo by the ſame means, it may reaſonably be preſumed, it will ſtill continue to gain additional credit, in the eyes of the diſcerning and impartial part of Mankind.

Among other ſubjects which the learned Univerſity Preacher has ſingled out, the Scripture Doctrine concerning *the coming of Chriſt* has, very properly, been brought forward for public diſcuſſion! It has, on all hands, been allowed to be a ſubject of great difficulty, and, if a judgment of its importance may be formed, either from the ſevere and pointed inſinuations of its Adverſaries, or from the manner in which it has hitherto been underſtood, by the moſt

able

able Divines—no ſubject ever claimed a more ſerious, or a more attentive conſideration; for nothing leſs than the moſt eſſential Intereſts of Chriſtianity are involved in the diſquiſition! It may, perhaps, very properly be added, that in the preſent ſtate of the world, an additional importance is attached to ſuch an enquiry, and an additional motive for undertaking it. One of the moſt populous and extenſive Countries in Europe, has openly abjured Chriſtianity, as an Impoſture. The ſeeds of Infidelity have, with incredible diligence, been ſown, in Germany, in Italy, in the Low Countries, and even in our own land; which promiſe a plentiful harveſt, to the utter extinction of what yet remains that is valuable among us. If any thing can ſave us from the deſolating judgments which are abroad in the Earth, it muſt be Religion—but a Religion which will affect the hearts, and influence the manners of a people, muſt firſt convince the Underſtanding, and every effort to produce that conviction, and to remove objections, which are brought againſt it, muſt have a ſalutary tendency to counteract the baneful influence of Superſtition and Enthuſiaſm, on the one hand, and the poiſon

of

of Infidelity on the other. The Objections of Infidels muſt be ſifted to the bottom—the very ſuſpicion of fraud, or falſehood, either in Chriſt or his Apoſtles, muſt be done away—or Chriſtianity will naturally, and neceſſarily loſe its influence, and rapidly meet that fate which it has ſo unhappily experienced, in a neighbouring Country, and bring on calamities, ſimilar to their's; which, barely to think of, muſt make the feeling mind ſhrink with horror! No employment therefore can be more important, or more conducive to the general welfare of mankind, than a fair and full examination of the Objections of Men, whoſe erudition and acknowledged abilities cannot fail to command attention.*

The

* At a period when the ſtricteſt ſcrutiny into the grounds and reaſons of the truth of Chriſtianity is ſo eſſentially neceſſary, any attempts to diſcourage the uſe of reaſon and ſound argument, eſpecially by the teachers of it, cannot but be very unfavorable to its intereſts.

Dr. Viceſimus Knox has expreſſed himſelf very ſeverely of thoſe whom he terms the moſt logical defenders of Chriſtianity, and the general tendency of his book, entitled Chriſtian Philoſophy, is to diſcourage the uſe of reaſon and argument, and to ſubſtitute in their ſtead, internal feelings and internal operations of the Spirit, as paramount to all other evidence. He ſeems particularly diſpleaſed with Dr. Paley's View of the Evidences of Chriſtianity, and inſinuates, that it is unanimated by a Spirit of Piety, and that he examines the truth

The Objection of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, upon the ſubject of *the coming of Chriſt*, when

truth of the doctrine with calm indifference, as if he were a dull Virtuoſo, diſcuſſing the genuineneſs of a Medal, or the Authenticity of a Manuſcript, valuable only as an amuſing curioſity! Never ſurely were inſinuations more improperly applied, than theſe to Dr. Paley's View of the Evidences of Chriſtianity!

But what ſeems more particularly to have offended Dr. Knox, is Dr. Paley's having called Jeſus Chriſt, *a Peaſant*, and *a Peaſant of Galilee*. There is, ſays he, ſomething peculiarly diſguſting in hearing dignified Eccleſiaſtics, living in ſplendor, entirely in conſequence of the Religion of Chriſt, ſpeaking of him, in their defences of his Religion, as *a Peaſant*, as a perſon compared to themſelves, vile and deſpicable—and he aſks—Is it the moſt likely means to overcome the prejudices of Unbelievers, who are commonly Men of the World, and teach them to bow the knee to Jeſus, thus to lower his perſonal dignity?

It might naturally be imagined from hence, that Dr. Paley had really ſpoken of Jeſus Chriſt as a perſon in compariſon of himſelf, vile and deſpicable, and if he had, there would have been juſt cauſe, not only of offence, but of indignation, at ſuch a compariſon. But this is very far from being the caſe.—His object, on the contrary, is to ſhew, that tho' Jeſus was in the moſt humble ſtation in life, he changed the Religion of the world, and that, as he himſelf ſpeaks, without force, without power, without ſupport, without one natural ſource or circumſtance of attraction, influence, or ſucceſs, and that conſequently he had a divine Commiſſion from above. This circumſtance alone, independent of every other conſideration, if true, conferred a dignity upon Jeſus, to which no Eccleſiaſtic, however eminent his Station, can pretend to have any claim! But in Dr. Knox's eſtimation, the fact of Jeſus being repreſented as *a Peaſant*, is ſo offenſive to unbelievers, that he wiſhes it

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when he enumerates what he terms the ſecondary cauſes of the rapid progreſs of Chriſtianity, is thus ſtated. " In the primi-

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to be concealed. There was, ſays he, no occaſion thus to lower his perſonal Dignity.

Dr. Knox ſeems not, however, to have recollected that this was no fiction of Dr. Paley's; for the Goſpel Hiſtorians themſelves, when ſpeaking of Jeſus Chriſt, deſcribe him, if not as *a Peaſant*, as *the Son of a Carpenter*, and he ſays himſelf, that *he had not where to lay his head*. The Apoſtle Paul ſcruples not to deſcribe him, as *in the form of a ſervant*, and he glories in the circumſtance of having been *Crucified*, regardleſs of the effect it might have on unthinking worldlings, and malignant Unbelievers. In cenſuring Dr. Paley therefore, for calling Jeſus *a Peaſant*, does not Dr. Knox, indirectly, at leaſt, cenſure the Writers of the New Teſtament; for tho' the word *Peaſant* is not ſtrictly ſcriptural; yet the ſhades of difference between *a Servant* and *a Peaſant* are not very perceptible!

Dr. Knox has aſſerted, alas! but too truly, that Infidelity is increaſing, and he thinks it will continue to increaſe, ſo long as Divines decline the means of Converſion and perſuaſion, which the Scriptures declare to be the only effectual means—ſo long as they have recourſe to human reaſon, and human learning only. But who, it may be aſked, are thoſe Divines who uſe theſe means only? Not ſurely Dr. Paley! His known regard to the Scriptures, and his able Vindication of them, ought to have exempted him from ſuch a charge. Beſides, it ought to be conſidered, that the Spirit's influence, of which ſo large an account has been given in the New Teſtament, was beſtowed, not prior, but ſubſequent to Converſion. Dr. Knox would therefore do well to conſider, whether he is promoting or injuring the Chriſtian cauſe, by decrying human reaſon and human argument, and extolling a principle as paramount to all other evidence; which, if a man poſſeſſes, is and can be known only to himſelf. At any rate, the ſound doctrine of the Spirit's Energy,

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" tive Church, the influence of Truth " was very powerfully ſtrengthened by an " opinion which, however it may deſerve re- " ſpect for its uſefulneſs and antiquity, has " not been found agreeable to experience. " It was univerſally believed, that the end " of the world and the kingdom of heaven " were at hand. The near approach of " this wonderful Event, had been predicted " by the Apoſtles: the tradition of it was " preſerved by their earlieſt diſciples, and " thoſe who underſtood, in their literal " ſenſe, the diſcourſes of Chriſt himſelf, " were obliged to expect the ſecond and " glorious coming of the Son of Man, in " the clouds, before that generation was " totally extinguiſhed, which had beheld his " humble condition upon Earth." " Yet," adds he, " the Revolution of ſeventeen " Centuries has inſtructed us, not to preſs " too cloſely, the myſterious language of " Prophecy and Revelation."*

for which ſome Preachers in the Metropolis, whom he takes as his Models, are, in his opinion famed, is awkwardly enough combined with *Theatrical trick, hypocritical extravagance, and ignorant effrontery.* Dr. Knox, indeed, pretends to ſeparate the Chaff from the Wheat, but it will be difficult to make a ſober thinking Man to believe, that the Spirit's Energy is ever ſo combined!

* Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 300.

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The learned Univerſity Preacher, treading in the ſteps of the Hiſtorian of the Riſe and Fall of the Roman Empire, mentions Our Lord as expreſsly foretelling that the Generation then exiſting ſhould not be totally extinguiſhed, till it had witneſſed his ſecond and glorious appearance in the clouds of heaven. "Yet," ſays he alſo, "the re-"cords of Hiſtory do not authorize us to "believe that this prediction was accom-"pliſhed at the deſtruction of Jeruſalem." And, what is particularly remarkable, after a profeſſed examination of the various paſſages of Scripture which relate to this ſubject, he concludes his enquiry with ſaying, that "it becomes the Antagoniſt of our "Hiſtorian, moſt earneſtly to conſider, "whether the real Intereſts of Chriſtianity "would not be more eſſentially promoted "by conceding the Objection to his Ad-"verſary, than by vainly attempting to re-"move it."*

It would be doing the greateſt injuſtice to the learned Univerſity Preacher, not to admit, that his ſentiments upon this ſubject have but too much countenance from

* See Dr. Edwards's Sermon entitled The Predictions of the Apoſtles concerning the end of the world. p. 35.

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ſome Chriſtian Divines, of the moſt conſiderable eminence in the literary world—nor can it be denied, that he has repreſented their opinions with the utmoſt fairneſs and impartiality.

" It may not," ſays he, " be thought " wonderful that Baronius and other Ro- " maniſts, to avoid the application of *the* " *Man of Sin*, ſhould earneſtly contend that " the ſpeedy appearance of Chriſt was ex- " pected by the Apoſtles. (See Mede's " Works, p. 665.)—But it is ſomewhat re- " markable, that the Orthodox Father of " the celebrated Prelate who tranſlated " Iſaiah, in a treatiſe deſigned to confute a " ſuppoſed Latitudinarian, ſhould aſſent to " the validity of our Hiſtorian's objection, " by confeſſing, without reſerve, that the " Apoſtles were miſtaken. (See Lowth's " Vindication, &c. p. 52.) Grotius in- " ſinuates that, for wiſe purpoſes, the pious " deception was permitted to take place. " (Gibbon, vol. ii. p. 301. See Grotius de " Veritate, lib. ii. §. 6. Clerie. ad I. Theſſ. " v. 10.) And an ingenious profeſſor of " our own Univerſity, does not appear ex- " tremely ſolicitous to relieve the Apoſtles

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" from the Accuſation of Error. See Dr. " Watſon's Apology, p. 62."*

The embarraſſments which theſe, and many other Writers who might have been mentioned, have diſcovered, do, indeed, abundantly ſanction the bringing forward the ſubject for farther and more accurate diſcuſſion. But doth it neceſſarily follow that theſe Authors have done the ſubject all the juſtice it deſerves? Have any of them entered into ſo minute and critical an enquiry into the merits of this Controverſy, as to preclude all farther diſcuſſion, and to warrant the concluſion, that the records of Hiſtory do not authorize us to believe that the prediction was accompliſhed at the deſtruction of Jeruſalem? If not, why damp the Spirit of enquiry by an intimation that it would be better to concede the Objection to the Adverſary, than by vainly endeavouring to remove it? Why give up the ſtrong holds of Chriſtianity, into the poſſeſſion of the enemy, before it is diſcovered whether they are tenable or not? It muſt ſurely require far leſs ſagacity than that of the learned Univerſity Preacher, to perceive that

* See Edwards's Sermon, pp. 12. 13.

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ſuch a conceſſion as is here demanded, muſt, if granted, have the moſt malignant influence on the real Intereſts of Chriſtianity; for a Religion which is founded in falſehood, can never have the God of Truth for its Author—can never be worthy of the reception of rational Beings! To ſay, as the Hiſtorian of the Riſe and Fall of the Roman Empire very gravely does, "that the influence "of truth was very powerfully ſtrengthened "by an opinion which has not been found "agreeable to experience," is to pronounce as groſs a libel upon Chriſtianity, as language can poſſibly convey. Opinions founded on falſehood, can deſerve no reſpect, nor can they be proved to be calculated for uſefulneſs. On the contrary, they muſt have the moſt pernicious tendency, even when they poſſeſs the plea of Antiquity; for no length of time can render that venerable which is, in itſelf, odious and deteſtable! If therefore the Author of our Religion, or his Apoſtles, made uſe of ſuch baſe Arts in the propagation of it, no reaſon can poſſibly be aſſigned for the rejection of Mahometiſm, which will not, with equal force, apply to the rejection of Chriſtianity!

The object of the preſent enquiry therefore is, (and a more important one cannot poſſibly be imagined) what foundation there is for the aſſertion of the Hiſtorian of the Riſe and Fall of the Roman Empire, that the influence of truth was very powerfully ſtrengthened by an opinion which has not been found agreeable to experience. Or, in other words, whether the predictions of Our Lord, concerning his coming *in that generation*, and while ſome who heard them were ſtill living, were, or were not, accompliſhed within the time limited by him?

It is doubtleſs diſcouraging enough, that on the verge of the Nineteenth Century of the Chriſtian Æra, ſuch unfavorable ſentiments have been entertained, by the ableſt Divines, upon this intereſting ſubject—but the following preſumptive arguments will probably contribute not a little to relieve the anxiety of the friend of Chriſtianity, as to the iſſue of the controverſy, and excite him to give the cloſeſt attention to the evidences of the true nature of *the coming of Chriſt*—that he came at the time appointed by him, and that his Apoſtles were thoroughly ſatisfied of his coming.

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The firſt preſumptive evidence of the truth of Our Saviour's prediction is, that it was not accidentally drawn from him, but was, on the contrary, repeatedly and deliberately made, and that upon various occaſions, throughout his whole Miniſtry—that, in fact, it formed the very baſis of his ſyſtem, declaring its completion, *in that Generation*, in terms as ſtrong as language could admit. Upon his entrance on his Miniſtry, Our Lord declared that *the kingdom of Heaven was* AT HAND, and he fixed the time of its *coming* in theſe very expreſſive and emphatical terms. *Verily I ſay unto you—Ye ſhall not have gone over the Cities of Iſrael, till the Son of Man be come.* With the like emphaſis and deciſion, he again limits the time of his coming, in the following terms. *Verily I ſay unto you—there be ſome ſtanding here, who ſhall not taſte of Death till they ſee the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. Verily I ſay unto you—this Generation ſhall not paſs, till all theſe things* (of which his coming in his kingdom was the principal) *be fulfilled.* And to add, if poſſible, to the force of his declaration—to give all imaginable ſtrength to the impreſſion which he wiſhed his prediction to make upon the minds of his

hearers, he ſubjoins this farther moſt ſolemn declaration—*Heaven and Earth ſhall paſs away, but my words ſhall not paſs way!* What now, it may be aſked, could have tempted Our Lord to have brought this Prophecy ſo fully into view, and to have expreſſed himſelf ſo ſtrongly upon it, as to render it impoſſible to fail of making the deepeſt impreſſion upon thoſe who heard it, but the firm perſuaſion that it would be accompliſhed within the time limited by him?

But whether this prediction was, or was not accompliſhed, it is obvious, both from the very peremptory manner in which it was delivered, and from the frequent repetition of it, that he put the credit of his character at ſtake upon the iſſue of it. This cannot poſſibly be denied by any who pretend to have any degree of conſiſtency in their principles. Now, it muſt be allowed, by the moſt ſtrenuous Advocates of Infidelity, that the Author of our Religion poſſeſſed a large ſhare of judgment and penetration. And the hiſtory of his life, as delineated by the Evangeliſts, demonſtrates that his prudence and caution were at leaſt equal to his abilities. In all that vaſt variety of circumſtances and ſituations in which he

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is exhibited to our view, by the Evangelical Hiſtorians, (many of which no human ſagacity could poſſibly have foreſeen) there is not a ſingle deviation from the ſtrict line of prudence and diſcretion: *To the Innocence of the Dove*, he conſtantly joined the *Wiſdom of the Serpent*. All the machinations of his enemies, many of which were certainly well deſigned for the purpoſe for which they were intended, were foiled by the wonderfully ſagacious and unpremeditated anſwers which their queſtions drew from him. The Hiſtory of the moſt enlightened Ages, and of the moſt celebrated Philoſophers, will, in this reſpect, bear no compariſon with that of Our Saviour. The inſtances of the woman taken in adultery, and of the tribute money, not to mention any others, are fine ſpecimens of the wiſdom which directed his conduct!

But if Our Lord really propheſied of an event which was to happen in his own age, and at a given period of that age, which did not happen, and which in that caſe he muſt have known would not happen—where, it may be aſked, was the wiſdom of ſuch a declaration—or, to ſpeak more properly, what could have exceeded the folly

of it? It would have required but little penetration to have foreſeen, that the failure of the accompliſhment of ſuch a prediction would, in all human probability, effectually blaſt his expectations of becoming the founder of a Religion, which in proceſs of time was to overſpread the whole earth, and fold within its embraces every human Being. A wiſe man therefore, it would naturally have been imagined, would either have declined the character of a Prophet altogether, or he would have predicted an event which was not to have happened, but at ſome very diſtant and remote period. Had our Lord contented himſelf with predicting *his coming* at the end of the world, or at any other very diſtant and remote period —his wiſdom would have remained unimpeached, even upon the ſuppoſition of his having been an Impoſtor; for by his prediction of ſo remote an event, he would probably have attained all the purpoſes which his utmoſt ambition could have wiſhed for. But nothing leſs than a conſciouſneſs of his being a Prophet of God, and that he ſpoke the words of God, could have juſtified a wiſe man in declaring, in ſuch confident and deciſive terms, and in terms

terms ſo frequently repeated, that he ſhould come *in that generation*, and while ſome who were then with him were ſtill living; for the detection of the Impoſture, if there was one, muſt, at ſuch an early period at leaſt, and before his Religion had taken a firm poſſeſſion of the minds of men, have been inevitable, and the conſequences fatal to the progreſs of his cauſe. It muſt appear wonderful, in the extreme, that modern ſagacity ſhould have diſcovered the falſity of a prediction, which no one, in the age in which it was made, had the leaſt ſuſpicion of, though they were confeſſedly taught to expect its accompliſhment!

A ſecond preſumptive evidence of the truth of our Saviour's prediction, may be drawn from the conſideration of the ſuperior excellence of his morality, and of his perfect conformity to it, in his own conduct.

The firſt qualification which he announced, of the firſt neceſſity to the admiſſion of men to be the ſubjects of his kingdom, was REPENTANCE, or a change of mind from Vice to Virtue. *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand:* plainly intimating hereby, that a ſuperior purity of character, to what they poſſeſſed, was ne-

ceſſary to their admiſſion into his kingdom. It was one of the principal objects of his miſſion, to correct and purify the vitiated morality, which was then too prevalent among his countrymen. *Except your righteouſneſs ſhall exceed the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall in no caſe enter into the kingdom of heaven.* This was the great object, in his excellent Sermon upon the Mount, and it is particularly worthy of remark, that the morality which he taught, was extended, not to the external conduct only, but to the inmoſt thoughts and intents of the heart. Whoever takes a candid and impartial ſurvey of the morality of the Goſpel, will ſee in it a purity and perfection which is no where elſe to be found. It is a very juſt obſervation of the learned Univerſity Preacher, " that to the excellence " of the Chriſtian Morality every impartial " judge muſt cheerfully bear teſtimony.— " Some cavils indeed have been raiſed " againſt a few of its precepts, but they " have proceeded from an ignorance of the " extent of their application, and from an " inattention to the circumſtances under " which they were delivered. Yet though " the Chriſtian Morality is excellent, it is

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" at the ſame time ſevere. It enters into no " truce with the indulgence of irregular " propenſities, or with the undue gratifi- " cation of the paſſions; the former it com- " mands us entirely to extirpate—the latter " to maintain under due ſubordination."* This teſtimony to the Morality of the Goſpel is the more valuable, as it comes from one who is eminently diſtinguiſhed for his knowledge of the wiſeſt and beſt Moraliſts in the heathen world, and who is perfectly acquainted with their comparative excellencies!

Nor was Jeſus barely a teacher of Morality. Whatever excellence the Morality of the Goſpel poſſeſſes, was, if the expreſſion may be admitted, perſonified in him. He was an exemplary pattern of every virtue which can adorn the human heart; of every thing that is amiable or admirable in character! Even the enemies of Chriſtianity have done juſtice, not only to the ſuperior merit of the Chriſtian Morality, but to the unparalleled excellence of Chriſt's moral character. He therefore who could have

* See Dr. Edward's Sermon preached at St. Peter's in Thanet.

ſaid,

ſaid, and whoſe whole life was in perfect uniſon with the declaration, that it was his *meat and his drink*, his primary object, *to do the will of God*, could not, it may fairly be preſumed, have impoſed a falſehood upon his diſciples, under the character of a Prophecy which, in a ſhort ſpace of time, was to determine whether he was a true Prophet or not. Such a conduct, it may confidently be affirmed, is too ſhocking to be entertained—is perhaps, all the circumſtances of his character conſidered, unparalleled in the hiſtory of mankind, and is moſt certainly utterly incompatible with that uniform deteſtation of vice of every kind, which ſo ſtrongly marked his character, as delineated by his Hiſtorians.

If it be ſaid, that in order the more effectually to gain his purpoſe of becoming the founder of a new Religion, and of drawing mankind the more readily to embrace it, he only *aſſumed* the garb of Virtue, without poſſeſſing it in reality, it muſt be allowed, that the Impoſtor who expects ſucceſs in his ſchemes of ſpiritual ambition, muſt obſerve ſome caution, and lay ſome reſtraint upon his conduct, to induce the world

world to reſpect his pretenſions. But with all his caution, it is ſcarcely poſſible for an Impoſtor to be always upon his guard againſt detection; ſuch a perſon having a part to act which is not natural to him, and conſequently the more difficult to be performed. Some indiſcreet moments therefore will occaſionally occur, when he will expoſe himſelf to obſervation—when he will appear in his true character, and the diſguiſe, however artfully aſſumed, will be removed. In vain, however, will the moſt ſedulous enquirer look for any ſuch unguarded moments in the life and conduct of Jeſus. In all that prodigious variety of circumſtances and ſituations in which he appeared to the keen and penetrating eyes of the moſt inveterate and the moſt watchful enemies that ever man had to encounter, he appears to have preſerved an uniformity of Virtue which is altogether unexampled in the hiſtory of human nature. The preſumption therefore is, that the prediction in queſtion, ſo unequivocally and ſo repeatedly made, was dictated by the ſame regard to integrity and uprightneſs, which directed the reſt of his conduct, and by a perfect confidence in its truth and in its accom-

accompliſhment, within the time limited by him!*

A third preſumptive evidence of the truth of the Prophecy in queſtion is, its cloſe connection with another Prophecy, which was of a nature at leaſt equally remarkable, equally notorious, and, at the time it was uttered, equally improbable, as to its completion. This was no leſs than the total overthrow of a ſtate which had ſubſiſted for

* A French Philoſopher, of the name of Lequinio, repreſents Jeſus Chriſt, "as the wiſeſt and beſt man that ever "lived—one who was actuated by the moſt ſincere good will "to all the human race; teaching the great principles of "moral equality, and the pureſt patriotiſm; braving all "dangers—oppoſing the great—deſpiſing alike, glory and "fortune—equally temperate with reſpect to himſelf—be-"neficent to others, and ſympathizing with all—hated by "the powerful, whom he provoked—perſecuted by the in-"triguing, whoſe artifices he expoſed, and put to death by "a blind and deceived multitude, for whom he had always "lived. This generous Philanthropiſt, who wholly ſacri-"ficed himſelf to the public good—who gave his whole "exiſtence to the unhappy, and even to his perſecutors, "never lied but to teach virtue."*

The Reader who has any taſte for excellence of character, cannot, it is preſumed, withhold his admiration of that which is here pourtrayed; eſpecially when drawn by ſuch a hand—nor his indignation at ſeeing this ſame character held up to the world as *an Impoſtor!* Happy however would it have been for mankind, if the Philoſophers of France had made this *great character* the model of their conduct! Had virtue been their ſole object, as it was his, the world would not, at this moment, have had to lament the calamitous events which have happened ſince the Revolution!

* See Prejugés detruits, p. 286.

ages,

ages, and at a period too, when the whole Jewiſh nation, (the Diſciples of Jeſus himſelf not excepted) inſtead of forming any expectations of ſo dreadful a cataſtrophe, were entertaining the moſt ſanguine hopes, under the auſpices of their Meſſiah, of being reſcued from the dominion which they were then under to the Romans, and of gaining the empire of the world.

It cannot but ſtrike the judicious and attentive reader, that the conduct of an Impoſtor, under ſimilar circumſtances, would have been the very reverſe of that of Jeſus! Inſtead of foretelling an event ſo terrible and ſo extremely ungrateful to them, he would have availed himſelf of the prevailing opinion, which was peculiarly favorable to one of an ambitious turn of mind—he would have *propheſied ſmooth things*, and foretold, in glowing colours, the future ſplendor and dignity of the Jewiſh nation, under his direction! Nor is it difficult to imagine what would have been the effect of ſuch an artful conduct! *Jeruſalem and all Judea, and the whole region round about Jordan*, would have flocked to his ſtandard, as in the caſe of John the Baptiſt, when he ſpoke of the approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom, and for the

ſame

ſame reaſon, and would have become the willing inſtruments of an ambition ſo exactly ſuited to their own! The conduct of Jeſus, on the contrary, ſeems wholly unaccountable, but upon the ſuppoſition of the integrity of his character. Nothing but the intereſt of truth, and the faithful diſcharge of the duties of his miſſion, could have induced him to predict an event ſo extremely unpalatable to his countrymen, and ſo directly oppoſed to all their deep rooted prejudices, as the deſtruction of their City and Temple, and the total overthrow and diſperſion of their whole nation! At the prediction of an event ſo awful, even his own diſciples could not forbear expreſſing the utmoſt anxiety! *When ſhall theſe things be?* and if they muſt be, for that is plainly the elipſis to be ſupplied—*what ſign ſhall there be when theſe things ſhall come to paſs?* How are our expectations of the accompliſhment of the great purpoſes of thy Meſſiahſhip to be realized, if theſe events are to take place in the preſent generation? We are utterly unable to reconcile theſe things together! If ſuch was the conduct of the Diſciples of Jeſus, much more might it be expected that ſuch a prediction would be offenſive to the

Jewiſh

Jewiſh Rulers, and prove, as it actually did, an inſuperable bar to their becoming his followers!

Theſe obſervations, in favor of the integrity of the character of Jeſus, may not perhaps be unworthy of notice, in a ſeparate view—but it is more immediately to the purpoſe of this preſumptive argument to remark, that the records of Hiſtory afford the fulleſt evidence which can be required, of the accompliſhment of our Saviour's prediction of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem —ſuch, indeed, as no one who is at all acquainted with the Hiſtory of thoſe times, will venture to diſpute! Or if he is ignorant of the Hiſtory of this awful prediction being fulfilled, the preſent ſtate of the Jewiſh nation is a ſtubborn proof of the fact. "The diſperſion of the Jews," ſays Mr. Henry Kett, "independent of Pro-
"phecy, is one of the moſt ſingular events
"in the Hiſtory of mankind: but when
"we conſider it as the completion of Pro-
"phecy—when we conſider this people,
"diſperſed and wandering among all the
"nations upon earth—without temples,
"without laws, without government—con-
"nected with none; but diſtinct from all,

"as

" as if preſerved to complete future pro-
" phecies—the whole together, I think,
" forms an argument of ſufficient force to
" weigh againſt all the cavils of infidelity."*
If therefore the evidence is complete, that this prediction of our Lord was accompliſhed, it is ſurely a preſumptive evidence of the higheſt kind, that, in ſome ſenſe or other, his prediction of his coming, *in that generation*, had likewiſe its completion!

Another, and perhaps as ſtrong a preſumptive argument of the truth of our Lord's Prophecy of his coming, as either of the preceding is, that it was expreſſed, in the very language, which *à priori*, it might have been expected he would have adopted. The Hiſtory of the Old Teſtament is, in the higheſt degree, valuable as an hiſtory of the various predictions of the coming of the Meſſiah. Upon theſe predictions, it is allowed on all hands, the expectations of the Jews, which were general at that time, were founded, and the language in which they were expreſſed, was perfectly familiar to them. No Jew, without forfeiting the character of a Jew, could be unacquainted

* See Kett's Hiſtory, the Interpreter of Prophecy, pp. 340-1. vol. i.

with

with it, and for our Lord to have expreſſed himſelf in any other language, would have excited no attention, nor have gained him any followers. He claimed that high character, adopting the language of one of the moſt diſtinguiſhed of the prophets, to which he adhered with the utmoſt exactneſs and preciſion, declaring that *the kingdom of heaven was* AT HAND—that thoſe to whom he addreſſed himſelf would *ſee the kingdom of God come with power*—that ſome among them *ſhould not taſte of death till they ſaw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*—that, in a word, it ſhould come *in that generation*, and that *with great power and glory*.

Whatever prejudices the Jews might have entertained concerning the true nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom, it was utterly impoſſible for them to underſtand our Lord, in any other ſenſe, than as aſſerting the approaching completion of the antient prophecies concerning the coming of the Meſſiah, and that they did, in fact, ſo underſtand this language, when John the Baptiſt firſt declared that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*, is abundantly evident, from their flocking to him in ſuch vaſt multitudes. *Then*, ſays the Hiſtorian, *went*

out to him Jeruſalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan. St. Luke ſays, that *as the people were in expectation, i. e.* of the coming of the Meſſiah, *all men muſed in their hearts whether he were the Meſſiah, or not.* It is equally clear, from the whole tenor of the Goſpel Hiſtory, not only that our Lord conſtantly uſed this language, but that, whenever he did uſe it, it never failed to excite the ſame expectations, and the ſame inquiſitiveneſs about the time *when* he would declare himſelf under that character! Can there then, it may ſurely, with the utmoſt propriety be aſked, be a clue to his meaning, in his declarations *that the kingdom of heaven was at hand—that they ſhould ſee the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*, and that they ſhould *ſee the kingdom of God come with power and great glory*, more natural than what theſe Prophecies afford? Or, can there be a ſtronger preſumption that this is his true meaning, in thoſe declarations? If there is any thing in the world which may be called *evidence*, or which approaches to what may be termed *demonſtration*, ſurely this has a juſt title to it; eſpecially if it be recollected, that the whole Evangelical Hiſtory, till the very

cloſe

cloſe of the Life of Jeſus, and even after his Reſurrection, repreſents the Jewiſh nation in general, and his own Diſciples in particular, as not ſatisfied that the Meſſiah was *yet come*, in the ſenſe in which they expected him to come! The propriety therefore of the uſe of this language to the laſt, by our Lord, and even the neceſſity of it, under ſuch circumſtances, cannot poſſibly be doubted by any one who thinks impartially upon the ſubject! On the other hand—It may again be aſked, whether it is not, in the higheſt degree improbable that our Lord ſhould, in uſing this language, predict *a coming*—a viſible appearance, after his removal from the world, and in that generation too, when his claiming the character of the Meſſiah ſufficiently accounts, not only for the uſe, but for the true meaning of that language!

If it be ſaid that an Impoſtor, as well as the true Meſſiah, would have taken advantage of the language made uſe of by the Antient Prophets—that he would have availed himſelf of the prejudices of the Jews, in claiming the character of the Meſſiah, and that therefore no concluſion can fairly be drawn from hence that Jeſus was the true

Meſſiah—this certainly cannot be controverted. The uſe of this language certainly was not, of itſelf, a proof that Jeſus was the Meſſiah, but it will not, it may be preſumed, be denied, that any perſon expecting to be attended to, under that character, could have uſed any other language, or could indeed have avoided the uſe of that which he did adopt, while the ſentiments of thoſe with whom he converſed, concerning the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom, remained unchanged; which is all that is here contended for, and all that is neceſſary to the ſucceſs of the argument, as a preſumptive evidence of the truth of our Lord's prediction!

Again—If the character and conduct of the Apoſtles, and of the earlieſt diſciples of Jeſus, is conſidered, they will furniſh the attentive reader of the Goſpel Hiſtory, with ſtill farther preſumptive evidence of the completion of our Lord's prophecy of *his coming*. They, it is plain beyond all reaſonable doubt, in common with the reſt of their countrymen, cheriſhed the idea *of the coming of the Meſſiah*, with the utmoſt ardor of expectation. With a hope that Jeſus was the Meſſiah, they joined him very early after

after his public appearance, and from the knowledge which an intimate acquaintance with him produced, they entertained very ſanguine expectations that he was the perſon. Nay, at one time, and that pretty early in our Lord's miniſtry, they declared, in expreſs terms, that they believed he was the Meſſiah, for when Jeſus aſked them who they thought him to be, Peter, in the name of himſelf and his fellow Apoſtles, ſaid explicitly and without heſitation—*Thou art the Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah—*the Son of the living God.*

With this perſuaſion upon their minds, they evidently appear to have been extremely anxious to know when Jeſus would declare himſelf as the Meſſiah—at one time aſking him *what would be the ſign of his coming*, and at another *when he would reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael?* Theſe queſtions were perfectly natural to men in their ſituation, and under the influence of ſuch expectations of the Meſſiah's eſtabliſhing an earthly kingdom, and ſuch as they could not have avoided expreſſing their anxiety to have reſolved. The Hiſtorian of the Riſe and Fall of the Roman Empire indeed has ſaid, that the Revolution of ſeventeen Centuries has

inſtructed us not to preſs *too cloſely* the language of Prophecy and Revelation.—And, after him, the learned Univerſity Preacher aſſerts, that the records of Hiſtory do not authorize us to believe this prediction was accompliſhed at the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and both of them more than inſinuate, that it remains to this day unaccompliſhed. But if theſe inſinuations are true, by what rules of probability can the ſilence of the Apoſtles be accounted for? If they viewed the predictions of our Lord, in the light here contended for, by theſe Writers, it may fairly be aſked—Were there none to be found among them, or their numerous followers, honeſt enough to acknowledge they had been deceived—none, who in the midſt of the ſevereſt perſecutions, availed themſelves of this fair and honorable opportunity of deſerting a cauſe which expoſed them to ſuch cruel hardſhips? It was not thus when Jeſus was crucified! The language of ſome of them then was—*We truſted that it had been he who ſhould have redeemed Iſrael.* Their hopes that he was the Meſſiah, received, in conſequence of his Crucifixion, a very ſevere check; but ſtill, *hope* was not totally extinguiſhed.

tinguiſhed. They now recollected, what before they could not at all comprehend, namely, what *the riſing from the dead*, which he had again and again predicted, might poſſibly mean, namely, that he himſelf might be the ſubject of that prediction, and they clung to it as their laſt reſource, their only remaining hope that they had not been deceived! *Beſides all this*, ſaid they, *this is the third day*, the day in which he ſaid he ſhould riſe again! How extremely natural was all this? How perfectly agreeable to what muſt have been the ſtate of their minds, at ſuch a criſis! But now, it ſhould ſeem, from the repreſentations of our antagoniſts, not a voice was heard to own the truth, nor a complaint made, that the word of Prophecy remained unaccompliſhed! On the contrary, thoſe of the Apoſtles and their companions, who ſurvived the deſtruction of their country, continued, with the greateſt firmneſs and ſucceſs, to preach the Religion of Jeſus—to ſuffer for his name, and earneſtly to exhort their converts to invincible ſtedfaſtneſs in the faith which they had embraced!

When the numbers which, at that period, had embraced Chriſtianity, are conſidered,

thoſe who are beſt verſed in the hiſtory of Impoſture, may ſafely be challenged to produce a ſingle inſtance like this. "There "have," ſays an ingenious writer, "been "inſtances of perſons dying in ſupport of "falſe *opinions*, which they held to be true; "but who ever gave up his life to atteſt "the truth of a *fact* which he knew or be-"lieved to be falſe, or of which he was "even doubtful? Even Enthuſiaſts have "never proceeded to ſuch a degree of in-"ſanity, as to reſign life itſelf in atteſtation "of what they knew to be falſe, which "muſt indeed be impoſture. Several of the "Apoſtles, and multitudes of the primitive "diſciples of Chriſt, however, did volun-"tarily ſuffer death itſelf, in its moſt "horrid forms, to witneſs the truth of "the Goſpel," *i. e.* that Jeſus was a true Prophet of God, and no Impoſtor.*

But, to do full juſtice to this preſumptive evidence of the truth of our Lord's prediction of *his coming*, it muſt be added, that the Apoſtles not only gave no hint of any failure of its accompliſhment, but they actually, and in the moſt poſitive and ex-

* See Thoughts, &c. on the Chriſtian Religion, by J. Simpſon, p. 89.

preſs

preſs terms, repeatedly declared their firm belief, that it was actually accompliſhed. After the Death, Reſurrection, and Aſcenſion of their Maſter, and more eſpecially after the deſcent of the Holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecoſt, the ideas of the Apoſtles, concerning the true nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom, were completely corrected, and their worldly and ambitions views ſubſided! In this change of their ſentiments, what was their conduct? Why they aſſerted, and that, in the moſt public manner, before the Jewiſh Rulers, *that God had made that ſame Jeſus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Chriſt, i. e.* both Prince and Ruler, or the Meſſiah. St. Paul ſays, that *by his Reſurrection he was declared to be the Son of God, i. e.* the Meſſiah, *with power.** St. John aſſerts, that *every Spirit, i. e.* every perſon, *who confeſſeth that Jeſus Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah, *is come in the fleſh, is of God. And every Spirit*

* It hath already been obſerved, how much the Diſciples of Jeſus were affected at the prediction of the Death of their beloved Maſter. It was very natural that they ſhould be ſo, and it was equally natural that his Reſurrection ſhould impreſs their minds with the ſtrongeſt conviction that he was the Meſſiah; eſpecially when they connected it with his prediction that thus it ſhould be! With great propriety therefore did the Apoſtle ſay, that *by his Reſurrection he was declared to be the Son of God* WITH POWER!

that

that confeſſeth not that Jeſus Chriſt is come in the fleſh, is not of God. Indeed it is needleſs to multiply inſtances of the conviction of the Apoſtles, that the Meſſiah was *come*, and that Jeſus himſelf was the perſon; for the whole conduct of the Apoſtles, after the deſcent of the Holy Spirit, was founded in the firm belief that the prediction of their Maſter's coming was fully verified! Prior to the Death, Reſurrection, and Aſcenſion of Jeſus, they did not, and they could not believe, that he was *come*, in the ſenſe which they affixed to his *coming*. On the contrary, their minds were conſtantly upon the ſtretch, to obſerve thoſe ſigns of his being the Meſſiah, which they looked upon to be eſſential to his character. Hence their queſtion to him—*when he would reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael*; and their demand, *what ſhould be the ſign of his coming?* Hence too, our Lord's declarations, ſo repeatedly made, that *they ſhould not have gone over the cities of Iſrael, till the Son of Man came*, that *ſome among them ſhould not taſte of death, till they ſaw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*, and that he ſhould come *in that generation*, or while ſome who were then preſent were ſtill living: all which expreſſions are evidently

evidently deſcriptive of one and the ſame event; and that they relate *ſolely* to *the coming of the Meſſiah*, will appear, more fully, when the ſubject comes under a critical and minute examination. In the mean time, it may be aſſerted, as moſt evident and undeniable, from the whole of the ſubſequent conduct of the Apoſtles and of the primitive Chriſtians, that they were thoroughly ſatisfied of the completion of theſe predictions, and of their own expectations, founded upon them, being fully anſwered!

The preſumptive evidences of the truth of our Lord's prediction of *his coming*, might be greatly enlarged; but there is one more which is ſo exceedingly ſtrong, that it would be abſolutely inexcuſable not to mention it. If the friends of Chriſtianity could have ſo far forgotten what was due to truth and to their own characters, as men of uprightneſs and integrity—if a ſenſe of ſhame for having been deceived, or any other principle which can poſſibly be ſuppoſed to operate upon the human mind, could, in ſuch circumſtances, have impoſed ſilence upon them; yet it would ſtill remain to be accounted for, how ſilence could have been im-

impoſed upon *the enemies* of Chriſtianity, who were ſufficiently numerous, ſufficiently acute, and ſufficiently forward, upon all occaſions, to teſtify their hatred to the Chriſtian cauſe. It cannot be alledged that they were unacquainted with theſe predictions of our Lord—for they were ſo repeatedly uttered, and ſo expoſed to general obſervation, that ſcarcely any one, whether friend or foe, who was at all acquainted with the Hiſtory of the tranſactions of our Lord, could be ignorant of them. If then, theſe predictions were not accompliſhed, in the ſtrict ſenſe in which they were ſpoken, within the time limited by him, what a glorious occaſion for triumph was here, to the adverſaries of the Chriſtian cauſe? What an opportunity to diſplay their juſt enmity to this riſing, and, to them, moſt odious Religion—an opportunity which it is *almoſt*, if not *altogether*, impoſſible to ſuppoſe, their invincible hatred to it being conſidered, that they ſhould not have availed themſelves of—an opportunity which could not but have proved, circumſtanced as Chriſtianity then was, fatal to its progreſs: Yet, wonderful to tell, here was, according to the repreſentation of unbelievers, a Prophecy unaccom-

accompliſhed, though expreſsly limited to a determinate period for its completion, yet Chriſtianity gained ground—it ſurmounted obſtacles which no other Religion ever had to encounter, and that, to uſe the words of Dr. Paley, " without force, without power, " without ſupport, without one natural " ſource or circumſtance of attraction, in- " fluence or ſucceſs." " When a Roman " Emperor," ſays the ingenious writer already quoted, " in the plenitude of his " power, demanded religious worſhip to his " own ſtatue in common with the other " Gods, and the Empire was obſequious to " his mandate, how could a few deſpiſed " men, unaided by learning, authority or ar- " tifice, engage a depraved and ſuperſtitious " multitude to refuſe the homage, when by " that they reſigned their lives,"* and that in favour of a Religion which, upon the ſuppoſition of the prediction not being fulfilled, was an Impoſture? While there was a ſingle individual who could come forward and ſay—The Author of this Religion predicted his coming at a given period, and that period has paſt without his prediction being fulfilled, this muſt have

* See Thoughts, &c. on the Chriſtian Religion, pp. 84-5.

proved

proved an inſuperable bar to the progreſs of his Religion. The fact, therefore, that Chriſtianity flouriſhed, and that in times and countries the moſt enlightened, is not to be accounted for, by human ſagacity, but upon the preſumption that the Prophecy was accompliſhed, and that the enemies of Chriſtianity were unable to deny its fulfilment!

Such are the preſumptive evidences of the truth of our Lord's prediction of *his coming*, in the generation in which he lived, notwithſtanding it has been ſo roundly aſſerted, and if not admitted, at leaſt not fully diſproved,* by the ableſt Chriſtian writers,

* Among others, the preſent very learned and very reſpectable Biſhop of Landaff appears to have failed eſſentially, in his proof that the objection of the Hiſtorian of the Roman Empire is not valid. Nay, he ſays himſelf, addreſſing Mr. G. "If, notwithſtanding what has been ſaid, (alluding "to his own reply to this objection,) you ſhould ſtill be of "opinion, that the Apoſtles expected Chriſt would come in "their time, it will not follow, that this their error ought "in any wiſe to diminiſh their authority as preachers of the "Goſpel." See Watſon's Apology, pp. 60-1.

But the worthy Prelate ſeems not to have been ſufficiently aware, that not the Apoſtles only, but Chriſt himſelf, is directly involved in the charge by the Hiſtorian of the Roman Empire; for his objection is principally founded upon the language of Chriſt himſelf, from which the Apoſtles are naturally enough ſuppoſed to have borrowed their's. The error therefore of the Apoſtles, if there was one,

writers, " that the Revolution of ſeventeen " Centuries has inſtructed us, not to preſs " too cloſely the language of Prophecy and " Revelation." They are, indeed, only *preſumptive* evidences, but they are ſurely ſuch as hold forth the ſtrongeſt encouragement to a minute and cloſe inveſtigation of the ſubject. They preſent the moſt animating proſpect, that the myſterious language of Prophecy and Revelation, as it is termed, cannot be preſſed too cloſely; but that the more cloſely it is preſſed, the more it will redound to the credit of the Divine Author of the Chriſtian Religion!

It ſeems to be a ſtriking mark of ſuperior wiſdom, that a Religion, the evidences of the truth of which, were to determine the judgment of all future ages, ſhould be communicated in the hiſtoric form; for no other form could poſſibly have been ſo favourable to truth—ſo unfavourable to Im-

one, was, in Mr. Gibbon's eſtimation, the error of Chriſt. " Thoſe," ſays he, " who underſtood in their literal ſenſe, " the diſcourſes of Chriſt himſelf, were obliged to expect " the ſecond and glorious coming of the Son of Man in the " clouds, before that generation was totally extinguiſhed." It is a remark of the Author of Purſuits of Literature, that Biſhop Watſon ſhould often write, but with the utmoſt caution and accuracy and conſideration, becauſe his works will always be read, p. 226.

poſture.

poſture. No other form could have been ſo well ſuited to prevent corruption. Inadvertent miſtakes of tranſcribers, or wilful interpolations, to ſerve the deteſtable purpoſes of a party, are ſooner noticed and corrected in an Hiſtory, than in any other way of writing, by their inconſiſtency with ſome circumſtances in the ſame narrative, or in different relations of other perſons. No one, in fact, will deny that Hiſtory, when it carries in it thoſe internal Characters of Truth which genuine Hiſtory never fails to poſſeſs, is, in the higheſt degree, ſatisfactory to the human mind. No lapſe of time can leſſen its evidence, or render the facts contained in it leſs certain, or leſs worthy of attention.* As Chriſtianity there-

* "The hiſtoric method," ſays the very ingenious writer again and again mentioned, "is evidently beſt ſuited to "give right notions of religion to the generality of mankind. It is the only one that is equally adapted to per- "ſons of all ages and ſituations. It gives proper impreſ- "ſions and ideas to the mind, at the firſt opening of its "faculties, before it is capable of deep thought, and to "perſons of the loweſt degree of underſtanding. It is "peculiarly adapted to children and to illiterate perſons, "to whom our Lord profeſſes to preach his Goſpel. Not "any thing, but living example, fixes more cloſely the at- "tention of a young mind, to what is right and proper in "behaviour, or gives him better ideas of it, than little "ſtories and artleſs deſcriptions of the manner in which "others

therefore is conveyed down to us in the form of an Hiſtory; the only legitimate method of ſtudying it, by thoſe who wiſh to attain its genuine meaning, ſeems to be as *an Hiſtory*. When it is conſidered in this light, it will be found to exhibit internal Characters of Truth, equal to thoſe of any Hiſtory, either in antient or modern times, and upon the ſubject of *the coming of Chriſt*, it will afford to the judicious and attentive Reader, *criteria* ſufficient to determine the true meaning of the Prophecy in queſtion —ſufficient to vindicate the character of our Lord and his Apoſtles—ſufficient, in a word, to prove, to the ſatisfaction of every impartial enquirer, that the objection of the Hiſtorian of the Roman Empire, and of the learned Univerſity Preacher, has no

" others have acted. The ſame fondneſs for narrative pre-
" vails in the youthful breaſt, and is increaſed and heightened
" by the more eager paſſions which prevail in that ſtage of
" life. Perſons arrived even to the maturity of their powers,
" read biographical relations with as much avidity as they
" ever did before, and derive from them more diſtinct ideas
" of proper conduct, than from the beſt deſcriptions of
" virtue. And in the decline of life, ſentiments and im-
" preſſions which are raiſed and revived by accounts of the
" actions of others, are ſtronger and more juſt than thoſe
" which any other way of writing can convey." See " An
" Eſſay to ſhow that Chriſtianity is beſt conveyed in the
" hiſtoric form." pp. 75-6-7. by J. Simpſon.

 ſolid

ſolid foundation in truth, but that it was, not *figuratively and metaphorically*, but fairly and literally accompliſhed! In ſhort, it will appear abundantly evident, that if Chriſtianity had been carefully and impartially attended to, as *an Hiſtory*, this objection, which it is the principal object of this enquiry to obviate, could never have exiſted! Or if it had ever exiſted, would have diſappeared, upon the moment of a fair inveſtigation!

The foundation upon which the Goſpel Hiſtory is built, is the declaration of John the Baptiſt and of Jeſus, upon their entrance on their reſpective offices, that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*; and it is deſerving of particular attention, that Matthew, Mark and Luke, adopt the ſame language upon the ſubject. When John began his miniſtry, the Hiſtorian ſays, Matt. iii. 1. 2. *In thoſe days came John the Baptiſt, preaching in the wilderneſs of Judea, ſaying—Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* When Jeſus entered upon his important office, it is to be obſerved that he uſed preciſely the ſame language. Mat. iv. 17. *From that time, i. e.* from the time that John was caſt into priſon, *Jeſus began to preach*

preach and to ſay, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And when afterwards he commiſſioned his Apoſtles and the ſeventy Diſciples to preach in his name, his inſtructions were, ſtrictly to adhere to this declaration of its approach. Say to them, *i. e.* to the Jews—*The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.* Their public inſtructions are likewiſe ſtiled *preaching the kingdom of God.* Thus Jeſus is ſaid to go into Galilee *preaching the kingdom of God.* And, in another paſſage, it is ſaid, Matt. ix. 35. that *Jeſus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their Synagogues, and preaching the Goſpel,* or good news, *of the kingdom, i. e.* of the kingdom of heaven, which he at firſt announced, *and healing every ſickneſs and every diſeaſe among the people.* So Luke, viii. 1. *And Jeſus went throughout every city and village, preaching and ſhewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.* And, as this was our Lord's original language, ſo he adhered to it, with the moſt ſcrupulous exactneſs, till the very cloſe of his life, telling his Diſciples that *they ſhould not have gone over the cities of Iſrael till the Son of Man,* that is the Meſſiah, as will hereafter fully appear, *be come*—that *there were ſome ſtanding there, who*

ſhould not taſte of death till they ſaw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. And but a very few days before his Crucifixion, when foretelling the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, he ſaid, Luke xxi. 31. *When ye ſee theſe things come to paſs, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.*

This hiſtorical fact, of the approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom, which had been predicted from the earlieſt times, and which the Prophet Daniel had foretold, in the very language which was made uſe of, both by John the Baptiſt and by Jeſus, lies, as hath already been obſerved, at the very foundation of Chriſtianity, and the Evangelical Hiſtorian has not failed to point out, in very ſtrong language, the effect which ſuch a declaration produced upon his countrymen; for immediately upon John's making uſe of it, he ſays, *Jeruſalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, went out to him, and were baptized by him.* In like manner, when *Jeſus went about all Galilee, teaching in their Synagogues, and preaching the Goſpel*, or good news, *of the kingdom*, it is ſaid, *there followed him great multitudes of people, from Galilee, from Decapolis, from Jeruſalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan.*

Dr.

Dr. Sykes has well obſerved, that " the " Jews were ſo well acquainted with this " language, and were ſo well apprized of a " kingdom which God had reſolved, in due " time, to ſet up, that as often as Jeſus " talked of the KINGDOM *of heaven*, or *of* " *God*, neither the people nor their Rulers " ever offered to aſk him the meaning of " that phraſe; which yet we cannot ſup- " poſe them not to have done, if he had " talked with and to them in a language " they were unacquainted with." See his Eſſay upon the Truth of the Chriſtian Religion, p. 29. Ch. iii.

Biſhop Chandler ſays, " the expectation " of the Meſſiah, intimated in the uſe of " this language, was not the opinion of a " few devout people only, who are ſaid to " *wait for the conſolation of Iſrael*, at the time " of our Saviour's birth, or of the meaner " ſort, who *thought the kingdom of God* (a " phraſe for the kingdom of the Meſſiah) " *ſhould immediately appear*; but it was the " ſettled judgment of the chief Prieſts, the " Scribes, and the learned in their law. " They who made the ſtudy of the Scrip- " tures their chief buſineſs, were unani- " mous in this belief—the expectation was

" national." See Biſhop Chandler's Defence of Chriſtianity, vol. i. p. 5.

Dr. Paley, in his View of the Evidences of Chriſtianity, ſays, " The Jews, with or " without reaſon, had worked themſelves " into a perſuaſion that ſome ſignal and " greatly advantageous change was to be " effected in the condition of their country, " by the agency of a long promiſed meſ- " ſenger from heaven. The Rulers of the " Jews, their leading ſect, their Prieſthood " had been the authors of this perſuaſion " to the common people. So that it was " not merely the conjecture of theoretical " divines, or the ſecret expectation of a " few recluſe devotees; but it was become " the popular hope and paſſion, and, like " all popular opinions, undoubting and " impatient of contradiction. They clung " to this hope under every misfortune of " their country, and with more tenacity as " their dangers or calamities increaſed." vol. i. pp. 22-3.

Nor is the evidence that this was the general opinion of the Jews confined to the Chriſtian Scriptures, or to Chriſtian writers only. The celebrated Joſephus, who was a diſtinguiſhed General in the early part of the

the laſt Jewiſh war, which terminated in the deſtruction of their country, bears ample teſtimony to the truth of this fact. "That," ſays he, 'which chiefly excited "the Jews to the war was, an *ambiguous** "Prophecy, which was alſo found in their "ſacred books, that, at that time, ſome one "within their country ſhould ariſe, that "ſhould obtain the empire of the whole "world." Tacitus likewiſe, the Roman Annaliſt, mentions the ſame perſuaſion as exiſting at that period, and particularly "that it was found *antiquis ſacerdotum libris*, in the antient books of the Prieſts." And moſt remarkable, to the ſame purpoſe are the words of Suetonius. "It was," ſays he, "an ancient and conſtant or uninterrupted "opinion throughout the Eaſt, *eſſe in fatis* "*ut eo tempore, Judæi profecti rerum potiren-*"*tur*, that it was foretold in the prophecies, "*antiquis ſacerdotum literis contineri*, that at "that time the people of Judea ſhould be

* It cannot be ſurpriſing, that Joſephus ſhould term this Prophecy *ambiguous*; for he had the ſame expectations of a temporal Meſſiah with the reſt of his countrymen, and when thoſe expectations were diſappointed, he applied the Prophecy to Veſpaſian. Afterwards, however, in his Antiquities, he fairly hints there, as do the reſt of his nation, that Daniel's Meſſiah was yet to come, and ſubdue the Romans. See Biſhop Chandler's Defence, p. 30.

" Lords of all." Nor is it unworthy of remark, that even Mr. Volney, who with unparalleled effrontery, denies there is any evidence worth notice of the very exiſtence of Jeſus Chriſt,* is nevertheleſs forced to own

* The Infidelity of the French Philoſophers, as they are fond of calling themſelves, is truely wonderful; for to diſbelieve the exiſtence of Jeſus Chriſt, is to render Hiſtorical evidence uſeleſs; for as has been very juſtly obſerved, there is not a hundredth part of the evidence for the exiſtence of Julius Cæſar, that there is for that of Jeſus Chriſt; and the man who has the hardineſs to deny ſuch evidence, is not fit to be reaſoned with!

The Author of the Purſuits of Literature, ſpeaking of Mr. Volney's Ruins, ſays, it is written with ſome ſpirit, and not without eloquence in ſome parts, and abounds with what is *now* called Philoſophy. The intent of this book is to attack every principle of Religion in the heart, even the principles of the Religion now termed natural. Mr. Volney wiſhes to convince mankind that *every* pretence to Revelation, in every age and in every country, is equally falſe and equally unfounded, and by a jargon of language and antiquity, and mythology, and philoſophy, he labours to confound and blend *them all* in uncertain tradition, and aſtronomical alluſions. The real ignorance of this man on the ſubject of true Religion, is as conſpicuous as the puny literature which appears to ſupport his ſtrange doctrines and fooliſh opinions. Upon the ſubject of what he calls the filiations of Religions, (for the French muſt have their new jargon of words in every ſubject) he ſays, " We acknowledge " in one word, that all the Theological Doctrines on the " origin of the world, on the nature of God, on the Reve- " lation of his Laws, and the appearance of his perſon, are " nothing more than recitals of aſtronomical facts, and " figurative emblematical ſtories of the play of the Conſtel- " lations, *(du Jeu des Conſtellations)* p. 167." The chapter

on

own the general expectation of a Deliverer, who was to eſtabliſh the Jewiſh nation in its antient glory. " From the time," ſays he, " that the Aſſyrians had deſtroyed the " kingdom of Samaria, ſome ſagacious " Spirits foreſaw, announced, and pre- " dicted the ſame fate to Jeruſalem, and " all their predictions were ſtamped by this " particularity, that they always concluded " with prayers for a happy re-eſtabliſhment

on the ſubject of Chriſtianity is the ſtrangeſt of all; for he declares that Chriſtianity conſiſts in the allegorical worſhip of the Sun, in the cabaliſtical names of Chris en, or Yes us, or Jeſus. And this is a formidable opponent! This is one of the guides to whom we are to give up our prejudices! Read any one of the four Evangeliſts, and give your own anſwer! The impudence of Mr. Volney is at leaſt equal to any other power he poſſeſſes; for he requires of his Readers only the ſurrender of his common ſenſe, and the common principles of any knowledge—yet he demands the admiſſion of all his allegories and myſtical meanings; of which, in the true French ſtile, no doubt is to be entertained, and then the world is to be emancipated and delivered! From what? From credulity and ſuperſtition! Q. E. D. Upon this, Mr. Volney obſerves, the Prieſts murmur. I think the Laity will at leaſt do as much, at the words of this Apoſtle of Nonſenſe, blaſphemy, folly, and the rights of man; which the French never fail to introduce, when they have laid them all proſtrate, civil, moral, and mental. This is but a ſpecimen of ſuch writers whom we are to obey as the deliverers of mankind from ſuperſtition, and the directors of our minds in the way of truth. *Profeſſing themſelves wiſe they are become fools.* Compare this note with that in p. 28.

" and

" and regeneration, which were, in like " manner, ſpoken of in the way of Pro- " phecies. The enthuſiaſm of the Hiero- " phants had figured a Royal deliverer, " who was to re-eſtabliſh the nation in its " antient glory: The Hebrews were again " to become a powerful conquering people, " and Jeruſalem the capital of an Empire " that was to extend over the whole world. " Events having realized the firſt part of " thoſe predictions, the ruin of Jeruſalem; " the people clung to the ſecond with a " firmneſs of belief proportioned to their " misfortunes; and the afflicted Jews waited " with the impatience of want and deſire, " for that victorious king and deliverer " that was to come, in order to ſave the " nation of Moſes, and reſtore the throne " of David." See Volney's Ruins, 3d edit. Engliſh Tranſlation, pp. 285-6.

With reſpect to the time in which the Meſſiah was expected, the Prophet Daniel, as Joſephus has obſerved, not only predicted things to come, which was common to him with other Prophets, but alſo a certain fixed *time* when they were to take place, and that he did ſo, in the caſe of the coming

coming of the Meſſiah, will be diſtinctly ſeen in the note below.* The general expectation of the Jews, at the appearance of Jeſus, plainly ſhews that that time was about to expire. And Mr. Kett, in his Hiſtory, the Interpreter of Prophecy, very juſtly ſays, " It is a very ſtriking fact in " proof of the general belief of the Jewiſh " nation reſpecting the time of the Meſſiah's " appear-

* Mr. Kett ſays very juſtly, " That in one point Daniel " differs from all other Prophets, and becomes an object of " attention peculiarly intereſting to us; for to him was " communicated the exact time when the Meſſiah would " appear."

Having quoted Daniel's Prophecy, he adds as follows.— " The leading circumſtances to be conſidered in examining the accompliſhment of this prediction are—the completion of the time ſpecified, and the events connected with it. All agree that theſe ſeventy weeks are weeks of years, that is, every day in the week is reckoned as a year, which makes the whole number amount to four hundred and ninety years. This computation is not unexampled in prophane Authors, and is uſed elſewhere in Scripture. It is uſed in reckoning the years of Jubilee, the time of ſojourning in the wilderneſs, and in the Prophecy of Ezekiel. Theſe ſeventy weeks commence in the Jewiſh month Niſan, or March, in the ſeventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus, King of Perſia, in the year of the world 3547, as is clearly ſhown by many accurate Chronologiſts, and proved at large by the learned Prideaux, in his connection of the Hiſtory of the Old and New Teſtament with prophane Hiſtory. This was the diſtinguiſhed year and month in which Ezra, the Leader of the Jews, obtained a commiſſion to return to Jeruſalem, in order to reſtore the Government of that City, and the ſervice

" appearance, that from the death of Herod
" the Great, when Judas of Galilee and
" Simon firſt aſſumed the title of Kings
" and Deliverers of the Jews, to the de-
" ſtruction of the Temple, the Jewiſh Hiſ-
" tory is filled with the names and actions of
" falſe Chriſts and falſe Prophets, who de-
" ceived both the Jews and the Samaritans.
" None appeared *before* this period, and not

ſervice of the Temple. And the ſeventy weeks were completed in the month Niſan, in the year of the world 4037. This was the ever memorable year and month when Jeſus Chriſt, the Meſſiah, cloſed his divine miſſion, and ſuffered death upon the croſs.

Three different periods of time are included within the ſeventy weeks, and each of them is connected with an important event—The *ſeven weeks* to reſtore and rebuild Jeruſalem—the *threeſcore and two weeks* in addition to theſe ſeven weeks, after which the Meſſiah was to be cut off—and *the midſt of the week* in which he ſhould cauſe the ſacrifice and oblation to ceaſe. The firſt ſeries of ſeven weeks, being forty-nine years, relates to the reſtoration of the Jews, and the rebuilding Jeruſalem, began by Ezra, and completed by Nehemiah. The oppoſition which the Jews, when returned from captivity, met with from the Samaritans, prolonged this ſacred work exactly for that period of time, and the obſtacles with which they had to contend, fully confirmed the words of the Prophet, that *the wall ſhould be built in troublous times.* The threeſcore and two weeks that ſucceeded, added to the foregoing ſeven, or in other words four hundred and eighty-three years, bring the calculation of time down to the year 4739 of the Julian period, which was the exact year in which the Goſpel began to be announced to the world." See Kett's Hiſtory, the Interpreter of Prophecy, p. 199, &c. vol. i.

" more

" more than one for five or ſix Centuries " *after* it." See Kett's Hiſtory, the Interpreter of Prophecy, vol. i. p. 210.

With this general expectation of the appearance of a perſon, under the character of the Meſſiah, at the time when Jeſus announced that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*; it might naturally have been imagined, that the whole Jewiſh nation would have become the willing ſubjects of it, and that nothing could poſſibly have been more favorable to his reception, under that character, than ſuch an expectation. The fact, however is, as ingenuouſly acknowledged by the Evangelical Hiſtorians themſelves, that very few, comparatively, of the Jewiſh nation owned Jeſus to be the Meſſiah. *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.* John i. 11. The Jews, in general, conſidered him as *an Impoſtor*, in aſſuming that character, and as ſuch they put him to an ignominious and cruel death. And even of thoſe who did adhere to him, from a belief that he might be the Meſſiah, whom they ſo earneſtly expected; it is related, upon various occaſions, that they expreſſed the utmoſt anxiety to have thoſe proofs of his Meſſiah-

ſhip

ſhip exhibited to them, which they had affixed to that character!

It is of the utmoſt importance that this general rejection of Jeſus, as *the Meſſiah*, by the great body of the Jews, and the earneſtneſs of his followers to be convinced that he ſuſtained that character, ſhould be ſatisfactorily accounted for; not only becauſe the truth of his claims to the Meſſiahſhip is concerned in it, but becauſe the whole doctrine concerning *the coming of Chriſt*, which has been the ground of ſo much offence to unbelievers, and of difficulty, even to Chriſtians, is particularly connected with it. If the Jews had juſt and accurate ideas of the nature of the Meſſiah's character, and Jeſus did not exhibit thoſe marks of it, which they had a juſt right to expect, their conduct was perfectly juſtifiable, upon the principles of the Moſaic Government, in putting him to death as *an Impoſtor*. But if, on the contrary, they totally miſtook the nature of the Meſſiah's character, it will from hence evidently follow, that it was the firſt duty of his office to give them juſt ideas of its nature, and to remove the prejudices or errors which they had imbibed concerning it.

In

In all enquiries concerning the Hiſtory and conduct of nations, it is abſolutely neceſſary to know ſomething of the cuſtoms, manners, and peculiar modes of thinking, which diſtinguiſh one nation from another. If this is requiſite, in general, it is particularly ſo, in the caſe of the Jews, who may *truly* be ſaid, in almoſt every ſenſe, to have been *a peculiar people*, and more eſpecially ſo, in their ſentiments and prejudices concerning the nature of the Meſſiah's character; for as the coming of the Meſſiah was conſidered by them as of the firſt national importance; ſo it neceſſarily had a powerful influence in forming their national character!

The celebrated Profeſſor White, the learned and eloquent Bamptonian Lecturer, has ſo fully and ſo ably expreſſed himſelf upon this ſubject, that no apology, it may be preſumed, will be neceſſary for preſenting it to the Reader in his own words.

" In the perſon of the Meſſiah, their pro-
" miſed Deliverer," ſays the Profeſſor, " they
" beheld a mighty and glorious King, who
" ſhould appear with all the pomp of tem-
" poral greatneſs, and all the terrors of
" earthly power, trampling upon the ene-
" mies

" mies and oppreſſors of Iſrael, and leading
" forth his people amidſt the triumphs of
" conqueſt, and the ſplendor of dominion.
" The manifeſt expiration of the time pre-
" ſcribed by the Prophets, the departure of
" the Scepture from Judah, and the ſub-
" jection of their country to the Roman
" power, were circumſtances which at this
" time added new weight to the opinion
" which had thus been endeared by early
" prejudice, and ſanctified by authoritative
" tradition. Every heart was now warmed
" with hope, and every eye looked forward
" with anxious expectation, to the moment
" when the glory of Sion ſhould appear, and
" Judea be for ever exalted above the king-
" doms of the earth—when they ſhould be-
" hold ſuppliant nations crowding into the
" ſanctuary, and Rome herſelf, the haughty
" miſtreſs of the world, bowing proſtrate at
" the feet of Jeruſalem.

" Nor were theſe glorious expectations
" confined to the chief Rulers of the Jews,
" whoſe ſuperior ſtations ſeeming to entitle
" them to the firſt honors and emoluments
" of the Meſſiah's kingdom, might have in-
" duced them the more readily to embrace,
" and the more induſtriouſly to diſſeminate

" an

" an opinion which promiſed ſo complete
" a gratification to their ambition. Even
" the Diſciples of our Lord, who had been
" in general ſelected from the loweſt and
" the meaneſt of the people, long retained
" the ſame deluſive opinion, and indulged
" the ſame fallacious hopes with the reſt of
" their countrymen.

" Nay, ſo firmly was this belief impreſſed
" on their minds, that not all the frequent
" and ſolemn declarations of their Maſter
" to the contrary, were able to efface it en-
" tirely. Nor indeed do they ſeem to have
" been effectually rouſed from the pleaſing
" dream of temporal grandeur which had
" captivated their imaginations, till his
" Death had tried the conſtancy of their
" faith, till his Reſurrection had revived
" their drooping ſpirits, and his Aſcenſion
" into heaven had rectified their errors, and
" invigorated their reſolution.

" From this miſtaken opinion aroſe the
" frequent ſtruggles for ſuperiority among
" them which they have ſo ingenuouſly re-
" corded. Hence the petition of the mother
" of Zebedee's children. Hence too, the
" impatient and miſguided zeal of Peter,

" who, when Chriſt pathetically related " his approaching humiliation, his ſuffer- " ings and his death, took him, and began " to rebuke him, ſaying—Be it far from " thee, Lord—this ſhall not be unto thee!"

Theſe obſervations of the learned and ingenious Profeſſor, do not relate to matters of doubtful ſpeculation, about which different opinions are entertained. They are fully admitted as indiſputable facts, by Chriſtians of all denominations. They are facts which are believed by all who believe that there was ſuch a perſon as Jeſus Chriſt, or who think there is any degree of credit due to the New Teſtament. Nay more—they are facts which the teſtimonies of Joſephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, and even the Atheiſtical Volney, fully corroborate. And what is particularly remarkable, they are facts which have for their vouchers all modern Jews; for they entertain the ſame ſentiments, and, as Chriſtians term them, the ſame prejudices concerning the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom, with their remote anceſtors, and conſequently they are living witneſſes that theſe facts are built upon ſuch a ſolid foundation of genuine Hiſ-

Hiſtorical evidence, as to leave no room for doubt upon the mind of the intelligent and impartial enquirer!

Such being the acknowledged ſentiments and prejudices of the Jewiſh nation in general, and of the Diſciples in particular, concerning the nature of the Meſſiah's character, and of that kingdom which Jeſus had announced as approaching; the delicacy of his ſituation, and the difficulties which he had to encounter, in unfolding to them the true nature of his character, muſt be abundantly evident from his very entrance on his public miniſtry. Every one muſt immediately perceive, from a due conſideration of the nature of their expectations, at the time of his appearance; the abſolute neceſſity that he was under, of his acting with the utmoſt prudence and circumſpection—of his being very ſparing of his declarations, on the one hand, that he was *himſelf* their Meſſiah, leaſt the too great eagerneſs of the people ſhould fruſtrate the great object of his miſſion; and, on the other, while he checked their ardor, leſt he ſhould totally deſtroy their expectations of his being the Meſſiah, by not giving them the neceſſary aſſurances of his *coming*

in that character, and thereby induce them to abandon him.

If the Goſpel Hiſtory be examined with a cloſe and impartial attention to theſe circumſtances, the judicious and attentive Reader cannot fail to obſerve the moſt unequivocal proofs of our Lord's having conducted himſelf in ſuch a manner as to anſwer both theſe important purpoſes. Far from being forward in declaring himſelf to be *the Meſſiah*, even to his moſt intimate friends and followers; it was highly to the credit of his character that, in general, he left this to be inferred from the excellence of the doctrines which he taught; from the purity and integrity of his conduct; and from the many wonderful works which he wrought among them. Occaſionally, however, and as circumſtances and events more particularly required, he gave them the moſt direct and unequivocal aſſurances of the coming of the Meſſiah; which anſwered the purpoſe of keeping up their expectations of *his coming*, in that character, and of inſuring their attachment to him, till, by the full diſcloſure of all the events which were to take place, during his abode upon earth, they would be effectually convinced that they

they had totally miſtaken the true nature of the Meſſiah's character! But it is remarkable that even when Jeſus aſſured his Diſciples of *the coming of the Meſſiah*, he moſt cautiouſly avoided ſaying that he was the perſon. He did not ſay—*Ye ſhall not have gone over the cities of Iſrael* before I declare myſelf to be the Meſſiah! But, *ye ſhall not have gone over the cities of Iſrael before the Son of Man cometh.* He did not ſay—*There be ſome ſtanding here who ſhall not taſte of death till they ſee* me coming in my kingdom—but *till they ſee the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

This cautious mode of procedure, though it perhaps diſappointed the adverſaries of our Lord of laying hold of his words to his prejudice—though it probably did not anſwer the ſanguine expectations even of his own Diſciples—though it ſometimes threw them into the greateſt perplexity, when they compared what he ſaid to them, with their own pre-conceived opinions of the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom—though, in a word, it did not fully ſatisfy them of what they moſt wanted to know—yet it was the only method which prudence dictated, whether it reſpected Friends or

Enemies; for he well knew what was in man, and was thoroughly aware that the former would gladly lay hold of any opportunity of accuſing Him to the Jewiſh Rulers, and that the prejudices of the latter were not to be removed, but by the moſt gradual and gentle means. It was upon this account that he conſulted thoſe prejudices, and, with ſo much tenderneſs, ſympathized with their weakneſs, well knowing that, in the courſe of his miniſtry, he ſhould have inſtructions to give them, which were very different from thoſe which they had been accuſtomed to hear, and events to unfold, in which both He and They would be deeply intereſted—events which were totally incompatible with all their ideas of the nature of the Meſſiah's character—events in a word, which, if all at once made known to them, could not fail of blaſting all their expectations of his being the perſon whom they looked for as their Meſſiah!

The firſt notice which St. Matthew gives of our Lord's entering upon the arduous and important work of correcting the prejudices of his countrymen, reſpecting the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom, is in his cele-

celebrated Sermon upon the mount; and, as thoſe prejudices were common to the people at large, as well as to the Diſciples; it is natural to expect that it would be addreſſed to the multitude in general, and not *excluſively* to the Apoſtles. The Evangelical Hiſtorian has been very particular in ſtating this to have been the fact; for at the cloſe of the chapter preceding the Sermon upon the mount, after having obſerved that *Jeſus went about Galilee, preaching the Goſpel,* or good news *of the kingdom of the Meſſiah,* he ſays—*there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jeruſalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan.* And, in the beginning of the fifth chapter, the Hiſtorian ſays, expreſsly, that it was in conſequence of ſeeing *the multitudes* that he went up upon a mountain, and addreſſed this Sermon to them. It is true, indeed, the Hiſtorian adds, that when Jeſus was ſeated, *his Diſciples came to him*; but this only proves that they made a part of his audience. But this matter is put out of all reaſonable doubt, by the Hiſtorian's remark at the cloſe of the Sermon; for he ſays that, *when Jeſus had ended theſe ſayings,*

the PEOPLE *were aſtoniſhed at his doctrine*; and that it might clearly be underſtood who were meant by *the people*, the Hiſtorian ſays, that *when he was come down from the mountain, great* MULTITUDES *followed him*.

Mr. Evanſon, who, upon all occaſions, extols the credit of St. Luke at the expence of the reſt of the Evangeliſts, ſays, that the Sermon upon the mount was delivered to the Diſciples; but even he is forced to own, that it was in the audience of a great multitude of people, and that he intended his inſtructions for the whole multitude of auditors with which he was ſurrounded. He adds—If indeed he had not, he would have acted directly contrary to his own doctrine, and inſtead of diſplaying the moral light of his Religion to the people, would have covered it with a buſhel. We muſt (therefore) he ſays, conclude that this diſcourſe was intended to be, and actually was heard by the ſurrounding multitude. According to Mr. Evanſon's own account therefore, St. Matthew and St. Luke agree that the Sermon was addreſſed to the Jews at large, or to the multitude, and not *excluſively* to the Diſciples. It ought farther to be obſerved, that the word *Diſciple*

ciple is ſometimes uſed in a very enlarged ſenſe, in ſome paſſages in the Goſpel Hiſtory, and that it was ſo uſed by St. Luke ſeems very probable, from the phraſe οχλος μαθητων, which at this early period was hardly applicable to his conſtant followers, or at leaſt certainly not to the Apoſtles. The evidence, therefore, ſeems to be complete, that the Sermon upon the mount was delivered to the multitude at large.

But of all criticiſms, the moſt trifling ſeems to be that which Mr. Evanſon has made upon *the place* from whence this Sermon was delivered, upon which he expends nearly two whole pages; for the expreſſion of St. Luke, notwithſtanding all that Mr. Evanſon has ſaid, is by no means contradictory to the account given by St. Matthew. The phraſe τοπος πεδινος may, very fairly, be tranſlated an even ſpot upon a mountain, as well as upon a proper plain, and that the Evangeliſt intended a plain upon the mountain ſeems evident, from the uſe of the word τοπος, which ſeems to have been unneceſſary in deſcribing a plain which was unconnected with a mountain. This word, therefore, ſeems emphatically to point out a particular

particular ſpot upon the mountain, from which our Lord might more conveniently addreſs his auditors; for whoever has been upon a mountain, cannot be ignorant that an even ſpot, and large enough too to contain a multitude, is no uncommon phenomenon even upon a mountain. Accordingly, as eminent a ſcholar as the Chriſtian world has known, ſuppoſes that τοπος πεδινος was not a valley, but a plain upon the hill.* Beauſobre and Lenfant are of the ſame opinion.

* Grotius's words are theſe—Id eſt, de ſublimiore ſeceſſu contulit ſe in planitiem montis, capacem majoris turbæ, i. a ſermo qui ſequitur habitus eſt επι τοπον πεδινον, in planitie ut hic apud Syrum, & nihilominus in monte, quod omnino exigere videtur Matthæi narratio. Grot. in loc.

It is ſubmitted to the judicious Reader, whether the opinion of Grotius is not ſupported by the conſideration of the warmth of the climate in Judea; a mountain being much cooler than a plain, and conſequently more comfortable both for the ſpeaker and for the hearers. That Jeſus retired thither to enjoy this convenience is moſt evident, from St. Luke's account, plainly in connection with the delivery of the Sermon; for he ſays, that *Jeſus went up upon a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.* Now this he would hardly have done, but for the ſake of the advantage of a cool ſituation, and the higher he was, the more comfortable probably he would find it. When therefore the multitude came to him, his decending from his more lofty retreat to an even ſpot upon the mountain, would afford *them* likewiſe the advantage of a cooler ſituation than if they had ſtood upon the plain, as Mr. Evanſon aſſerts they did. And thus St. Matthew's and Luke's accounts are, in this reſpect at leaſt, perfectly harmonious!

After

After what has been here preſented to the Reader, let him judge of the propriety of Mr. Evanſon's reaſoning!—"Now," ſays he, "let any man who knows what it is to ſpeak to a crowd of people, conceive what ſituation a ſpeaker, who wiſhed to be heard by as many as poſſible, would chooſe for himſelf, on ſuch an occaſion. If the people were in an open plain, he would endeavour to take the advantage of ſome ſmall riſe in the ground, or other mode of elevating himſelf, ſo as to be ſeen by his audience; or if an hill were adjoining, he would aſcend the ſlope of the hill a little way, ſo as to anſwer the purpoſe, whilſt the people remained in the plain; or if they aſcended the hill, he would accompliſh the ſame effect by remaining himſelf at the foot of it, in the plain: but would any man in his ſenſes, ſo circumſtanced, and intending to be heard by the croud, go up to the top of the hill, which, from its convex form, muſt neceſſarily prevent all but thoſe who immediately ſurrounded him, from either ſeeing or hearing him, and even there ſet himſelf down before he began to teach them." "Yet preciſely ſuch," ſays Mr. Evanſon, "is the ſituation in which the Author of this Hiſ-

tory

tory makes our Saviour place himſelf, to inſtruct the people in the moral duties of the Goſpel!"*

A little candor, and even Mr. Evanſon's own reaſoning, here quoted, might have ſhewn him, that going up upon a mountain did not neceſſarily ſuppoſe going up to the very top of it, and moſt certain it is, that St. Matthew aſſerts no ſuch thing. But after all, who will venture to aſſert that St. Matthew's and St. Luke's accounts were delivered upon the ſame occaſion? There are, indeed, ſome particulars in the two accounts common to both the Evangeliſts; but whoever will be at the pains to examine them, will find St. Matthew's Sermon far more diffuſe and comprehenſive than that of Luke, ſo that there is nothing unnatural in ſuppoſing that they were delivered upon different occaſions, and were intended to anſwer different purpoſes!

It is difficult to refrain from making one remark here, namely, that Mr. Evanſon has choſen St. Luke's account for his favourite Hiſtory, and the reſt are, in his eſtimation, of no value—are, in ſhort, Impoſtures! Dr. Prieſtley, on the contrary, has aſſerted,

* See Evanſon's Diſſonance, p. 140.

that

that the authority of Luke is certainly leſs than that of an Apoſtle, and that he might poſſibly have been miſinformed with reſpect to the early part of his Hiſtory. It is not difficult to perceive the pernicious tendency of ſuch opinions!

It being clear, from what has been ſaid, and even from Mr. Evanſon's view of the matter, that the Sermon upon the mount was addreſſed to the people at large; it will appear upon examination, that there is the ſtrongeſt internal evidence that the firſt object of our Lord, in this Sermon, was to correct the erroneous opinions of his hearers, concerning the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom. This will appear, from the following ſhort paraphraſe of the Beatitudes; which, though not abſolutely neceſſary to the great deſign of this work, will not, perhaps, be thought wholly unconnected with it, or unworthy of the judicious Reader's attention, particularly as it will lead to the conſideration of a few verſes which immediately ſucceed them, the beauty, propriety, and force of which, ſeem not to have been ſufficiently attended to.

The Jews entertained the fond imagination of enjoying high diſtinction, and poſ-

ſeſſing

ſeſſing places of great truſt and importance under their Meſſiah. But Jeſus, who was thoroughly acquainted with the human heart, inſtead of ſaying that ſuch a diſpoſition was oppoſite to the character which became the ſubjects of the Meſſiah's kingdom, contented himſelf with ſimply deſcribing the diſpoſition that would qualify them for becoming ſuch. *Bleſſed*, or happy, *are they who are poor in ſpirit*, or who are unambitious and humble minded, *for their's is the kingdom of heaven.*

With the poſſeſſion of univerſal dominion, under their Meſſiah, and the exalted ſtations conſequent upon it, the Jews, naturally enough, connected great pleaſures and enjoyments of every kind. But Jeſus, foreſeeing the awful events which were to happen to their country, taught them that a ſtate of ſorrow and mourning was beſt ſuited to the circumſtances of the times, and moſt agreeable to the declaration which he had made—that Repentance was a neceſſary preparation in perſons of their deſcription, for an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. *Bleſſed are they that mourn, for they ſhall be comforted.* In the midſt of the calamities which are coming upon the Jewiſh nation, they

they ſhall have their peculiar conſolations; while thoſe who are expecting great enjoyments and worldly pleaſures, under the reign of their Meſſiah, ſhall have their views completely fruſtrated, and be involved in the general ruin which is coming upon the nation.

The Jews conſidered a war-like ſpirit in their nation, as eſſential to the promotion of their aſpiring views, with regard to the conqueſts which they expected to make, under the banners of their Meſſiah. But to this Jeſus oppoſed a ſpirit, which was of a nature, both in its principle and in its effects, totally different. *Bleſſed are the meek, for they ſhall inherit the earth.* This meekneſs of temper will better qualify them for enjoying with comfort, ſuch a portion of this world's goods, as the condition of the ſubjects of the Meſſiah's kingdom requires, and the providence of God ſhall allot to them, than the moſt war-like courage, and the moſt heroic and enterprizing ſpirit.

The Jews were thirſting for exemption from the ſervitude which they were under to the Romans, and ſtill more to conquer and ſubdue them: and their appetites were not to be ſatiated but by becoming, under their expected Meſſiah, the abſolute Lords

of

of the world. But Jeſus, on the contrary, endeavoured to turn their attention to a very different object, for the exerciſe of their ambition. *Bleſſed are they who hunger and thirſt after righteouſneſs, for they ſhall be filled.* That will yield them more ſolid and durable ſatisfaction than the moſt extenſive acquiſitions of a worldly nature, and at the ſame time they ſhall have ſuch a ſufficiency of the enjoyments of this world, as ſhall anſwer all the purpoſes of real happineſs. In a ſubſequent part of this Sermon, our Lord more fully explains this beatitude. ch. vi. 33. *Seek ye firſt the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs, i. e.* the righteouſneſs which is inſeparably connected with it, *and all theſe things*, viz. food and raiment, and all that is neceſſary to the comfortable enjoyment of life, *ſhall be added unto you*; for, ſays our Lord—*Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all theſe things.*

The Jews confined their charity and compaſſion to thoſe of their own nation, and had no dealings, even with Samaritans, though more nearly allied to them, both in civil and religious ſentiments, than any other people. But, in oppoſition to this narrowneſs of diſpoſition, Jeſus ſays—*Bleſſed*

are

are the merciful, for they ſhall obtain mercy. St. Luke's manner of expreſſion ſeems to be an admirable comment upon this paſſage. ch. vi. 36. *Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father alſo is merciful, i. e.* Let your mercy be as extenſive as that of the great Parent of the Univerſe; which is not confined to this or the other nation, but folds within its embraces the whole human race, and *is kind even to the unthankful and to the evil.**

* That a charitable and humane diſpoſition towards other nations, or parties who differ in ſentiments from ourſelves, is intended to be pointed out in this beatitude, ſeems extremely probable, from the very high pitch to which the Jews carried their national partiality. St. Peter candidly confeſſed that he, in common with the reſt of his countrymen, conſidered it even as unlawful to keep company with, or to go to one of another nation, believing that they were, *excluſively*, the favorites of heaven. The unfriendly influence which this principle muſt have had in contracting the humane and benevolent affections, muſt be obvious to every one, and therefore it with great propriety made an important part of the inſtructions of one; the baſis of whoſe Religion was, that God was the common Father of all mankind, to counteract ſuch a narrowneſs of mind. If there is any one virtue of the human heart, more peculiarly calculated to produce happineſs than another; it is the exertion of the humane and tender affections towards our fellow men; and when it is exerted upon that never to be forgotten and fundamental principle, that we are all the children of one common Parent; then it muſt do the higheſt honor to our nature, and be moſt acceptable and pleaſing to him who is moſt aſſuredly concerned for the welfare of all mankind!

The Jews, as appears from various parts of the Goſpel Hiſtory, were extremely nice and punctilious in their external conduct, and loſt no occaſion of diſplaying the ſuperior ſanctity of their characters, by praying in the corners of the ſtreets, by giving alms in the moſt public manner, by making broad their phylacteries, &c. while, at the ſame time, they devoured widows' houſes, omitted the weightier matters of the law, and were, in reality, full of hypocriſy and iniquity. With a particular view to this part of their character, our Lord ſeems to have pronounced this beatitude—*Bleſſed are the pure in heart, for they ſhall ſee God.* No outward actions, however ſpecious and plauſible to men who can judge from the appearance *only*, are truly valuable in the ſight of God, unleſs they proceed from purity of intention and an upright heart; nor will they who perform them be entitled to that enjoyment of God, which is the ſum of all true happineſs.

The ſentiments of the Jews concerning the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom, naturally led them to cheriſh diſpoſitions the moſt unfriendly to peace. But, to check, and if poſſible, to root out propenſities ſo adverſe to human happineſs, and to the

the quiet and ſecurity of mankind, Jeſus ſays—*Bleſſed are the peace-makers*, for they ſhall be called or accounted as the children of God, who is the God of Peace; which would moſt eminently qualify them to become the ſubjects of the Meſſiah's kingdom, which they were ſo anxiouſly expecting ſhould immediately appear!

A ſtate of ſuffering, according to the ideas which the Jews had formed of thoſe glorious times, which they were then expecting, was in a great meaſure, at leaſt, incompatible with thoſe times. If, however, oppoſition ſhould poſſibly ariſe, they fully expected that, under the conduct of their Meſſiah, it would ſoon ſubſide, and terminate in the completion of all their wiſhes. But the doctrine of Jeſus upon this ſubject, taught them what, by referring to the Hiſtory of their Anceſtors, they might previouſly have known, namely, that an exemption from trouble was, at no period of their Hiſtory, a mark of the divine diſpleaſure. *Bleſſed*, or happy, ſays Jeſus, *are they who are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake, for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Bleſſed are ye when men ſhall revile you and perſecute you falſly, for my ſake. Rejoice and*

be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for ſo perſecuted they the Prophets who were before you.

How far the ſpirit of theſe beatitudes has been caught, in this paraphraſe, muſt be left to the judicious Reader to determine; but it ſeems impoſſible not to perceive the reference which they had to the peculiar ſentiments which influenced the Jews, with reſpect to the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom, and their admirable tendency to give them juſter views upon this important ſubject.

Having, in theſe beatitudes, announced to his hearers the qualifications which were peculiarly calculated to render them happy, under the reign of their Meſſiah, whoſe kingdom was eminently deſigned to be a *kingdom of righteouſneſs and peace*, our Lord proceeds, with an admirable unity of deſign, to awaken the attention of his hearers to the importance of their ſituation *as Jews*, and their ſuper-eminent advantages for the promotion and extention of the knowledge of what he had been teaching them, concerning the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom, and of the dangerous conſequences to themſelves, of not making a right uſe of

thoſe advantages. v. 13. *Ye are the ſalt of the earth; but if the ſalt hath loſt its ſavor*, or its ſaltneſs, *wherewith ſhall it be ſalted*; or, rather, how ſhall it recover its ſaltneſs? *It is no longer good for any thing but to be caſt out and trodden under foot of men.* That is, as the words ſeem fairly to imply, when conſidered in connection with the preceding and ſubſequent context, and more particularly with verſes 19 and 20—Ye Jews, in the preſent ſtate of the world, are yet, as ye have hitherto been, from the earlieſt period of your Hiſtory, *the ſalt of the earth*—the only depoſitaries for the preſervation of the knowledge of God among the nations of the earth: *But if the ſalt hath loſt its ſaltneſs*, or is become inſipid; if by your traditions afterwards, in this very Sermon particularly ſpecified, you have made void the laws of God, and ſo corrupted them as to render them of no effect, you will ceaſe to anſwer the purpoſes of ſalt for preſervation, and being become inſipid or of no uſe, you will be thrown away, and trodden under foot.

In the following verſe, our Lord changes the metaphor, but ſtill expreſſes the ſame

ſentiment, under the ſublimeſt of images. v. 14. *Ye are the light of the world; a city that is ſet*, or built, *upon a hill, cannot be hid.* That is—Your ſituation for communicating light to the world around you, is as conſpicuous as a city which is built upon an eminence, which is ſeen by every one, and cannot be concealed!

The ſituation of the Jewiſh nation, with reſpect to the nations which ſurrounded them, both at and before the time of our Saviour, gives a peculiar propriety and beauty to the metaphors here adopted, as applied to them *nationally*; and nothing ſurely could be more admirably adapted to rouſe them to a juſt ſenſe of theſe important prerogatives, than ſuch a repreſentation; eſpecially when it is added, that by a neglect to improve theſe advantages, they would not only be expoſed to the danger of loſing them, but like ſalt which hath loſt its ſaltneſs, be caſt out and trodden under foot. This was, unhappily and notoriouſly, the fact with reſpect to this infatuated and devoted nation! They ſoon loſt their diſtinguiſhed pre-eminence, and were, even to a proverb, caſt out and trodden under foot—

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the objects of contempt and deriſion to all nations; in which unhappy and deplorable condition they remain to this very day, the monuments of divine vengeance! "Jeru-"ſalem," ſays Mr. Kett, "has been thus "conſtantly trodden down of the Gentiles, "the Romans, the Saracens, the Franks, "and the Turks. Its antient inhabitants "have been expelled and perſecuted, and "its holy places have been polluted. The "eagles of idolatrous Rome, the creſcent "of the Impoſtor Mahomet, and the banner "of Popery, carried by the Cruſaders, have "been ſucceſſively diſplayed amidſt the "ruins of the ſanctuary of Jehovah, for "nearly 1800 years."*

If the preceding interpretaion of the 13th and 14th verſes be juſt, there cannot be any difficulty in giving to the following verſe a preciſe and determinate meaning; a meaning which is replete with ſound reaſoning, and which perfectly harmonizes with the laſt metaphor, of the Jews being *the light of the world.* v. 15. *Men do not light a candle and put it under a buſhel, but on candleſtick, and it giveth light to all that are*

* See Kett's Hiſtory, the Interpreter of Prophecy, pp. 304-5.

in the houſe. As if he had ſaid—Ye Jews have been appointed by Providence to be *the lights of the world,* upon the ſame principle, and for the ſame purpoſe that men light a candle in their houſes, namely, that all who are in them may enjoy the benefit of its light. This being the deſign of men, in their humbler ſpheres of action; it is for a like purpoſe, but for a far more important one, that God has placed you in the ſuper-eminent ſituation which you now enjoy. In this view, how natural and how forcible is the concluſion which our Lord draws from this reaſoning? *So let your light ſhine before men, that they may ſee your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Having thus pointed out to the Jews, the ſuperior importance of their ſituation among the nations of the world, under the metaphors of *ſalt to preſerve,* and of *light to communicate* the knowledge of God, and having urged upon them the importance of improving the advantages which they poſſeſſed, by motives which were peculiarly intereſting to them *as Jews,* our Lord proceeds, in the verſe immediately following, with the ſame regard to the ſentiments of the Jews, concerning the nature of the Meſſiah's

Meſſiah's kingdom, which he had already, ſo pointedly, diſplayed, and particularly guards them againſt imagining that to promote their ambitious and ſelf-intereſted purpoſes, it was his deſign to introduce a relaxation of the Eternal Laws of Juſtice, Equity and Righteouſneſs, in their favor. v. 17. *Think not that I am come to deſtroy the Law, or the Prophets.* Very far from it. On the contrary, *I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfill*; that is—I am not come to deſtroy either, but to fulfil both—to give perfection to the one, and to accompliſh what the others have written of me; *for verily I ſay unto you, till heaven and earth paſs, one iota, or one tittle, ſhall in no wiſe paſs from the law till all be fulfilled.* And to let them know of what immenſe importance the eternal laws of morality, the lights by which they were to ſhine before men, in his eſtimation, were; he adds, what muſt for ever do the higheſt honor to him and his Religion, v. 19. *Whoſoever therefore ſhall break one of the leaſt of theſe commandments,* (of the law) *and ſhall teach men ſo, he ſhall be called the leaſt in the kingdom of heaven; but whoſoever ſhall do and teach them, the ſame ſhall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I ſay unto you, that except your righteouſ-*

righteouſneſs ſhall very far exceed (for ſo the original imports) *the righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, you ſhall in no caſe enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

The remaining part of this moſt excellent Sermon upon the mount, is plainly intended to correct, in detail, the highly vitiated morality of the Jews, in points of great and eſſential importance—to introduce in its ſtead ſuch a purity and rectitude of morals as ſhould extend to the whole conduct, internal as well as external, and ſuch as would render them worthy of the ſubjects of his kingdom—ſuch, in a word, as would make them to ſhine as lights in the world, and be productive of the beſt effects in promoting the knowledge of God and his Son, among the nations who were ſitting in darkneſs, and in the region and ſhadow of death; to illuminate whom, was one great and important purpoſe of the coming of the Meſſiah!

This view of the general nature and deſign of our Lord's Sermon upon the mount, and particularly of the former part of it, is ſufficient, it may be preſumed, not only to reſcue it from the imputation which Mr. Evanſon has thrown on it, of its being a deſultory unconnected harangue, and an incoherent

coherent moral lecture; but to excite the admiration of every perſon of a juſt taſte, of the wiſdom which dictated it; ſufficient to ſatisfy the moſt incredulous, that it contains every internal character of its being genuine, which the moſt rigid laws of criticiſm can require. The diſpoſitions delineated in the beatitudes, are ſuch as are moſt ornamental to human nature—ſuch as are every way worthy of a teacher come from God, and ſuch as might, *à priori*, have been expected from the Divine Author of our Religion; eſpecially when addreſſing men, whoſe ſentiments and characters were ſuch as they are univerſally allowed to have been!

The effect which this diſcourſe had upon the minds of the hearers, was ſuch as might naturally have been expected from the uſe of a language which was, and could not but appear to them, ſo new and extraordinary. The Evangeliſt has not failed to point this out, in a very impreſſive and ſtriking manner. *When Jeſus*, ſays he, *had ended theſe ſayings, the people were aſtoniſhed at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.*

The Reader's attention is now particularly requeſted to a critical and minute examination

tion of the various paſſages, in the Goſpel Hiſtory, conſidered as ſuch, which more immediately relate to the *coming of Chriſt*; in which he will poſſeſs the advantage, with very little trouble, of referring to thoſe paſſages, as they ſtand in the New Teſtament; of forming an accurate judgment of the reaſoning which is adopted, and of detecting any improper concluſions, if any ſuch there ſhould be, which either inattention, or prejudice, may have too haſtily formed!

The eighth and ninth chapters of St. Matthew, which immediately follow the Sermon upon the mount, are chiefly employed in the relation of various acts of power which Jeſus exerted, for the benefit of his countrymen, but chiefly with a view to engage their attention to him as *the Meſſiah*. And towards the cloſe of the latter of theſe chapters, the Evangeliſt ſays, that *Jeſus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their ſynagogues and preaching the Goſpel*, or good news, *of the kingdom*.

It can require no formal proof, after what has been ſaid, that the work, in which Jeſus was here engaged, was the announcing the approach of *the Meſſiah*, or of the kingdom which he was to ſet up, and giving his hearers

hearers ſuch inſtructions concerning its nature as circumſtances might require. It ſeems equally evident, when it is ſaid, immediately afterwards, that *when Jeſus ſaw the multitudes*, and *was moved with compaſſion towards them, becauſe they fainted, and were ſcattered abroad as ſheep having no ſhepherd*, that his compaſſion aroſe from a deep ſenſe of the importance and the difficulty of his undertaking, and of the deplorable condition of the great body of the people, from the neglect or from the impoſitions of their Rulers. With this impreſſion upon his mind, he ſays, v. 37. *The harveſt truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few—Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harveſt, that he may ſend forth laborers into his harveſt.*

In this connection the tenth chapter, with ſingular propriety, opens with an account of Jeſus's inveſting the twelve Apoſtles, (whoſe names are particularly mentioned) with a power over unclean ſpirits, of healing all kinds of diſeaſes, and of his giving them a commiſſion to aſſiſt in the execution of his important office, of announcing to his countrymen the approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom. v. 1. *And when he had called unto him his twelve Diſ-*

Diſciples, he gave them power over unclean ſpirits, to caſt them out, and to heal all manner of ſickneſs, and all manner of diſeaſe. And he commanded them, ſaying—Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael. And, as ye go, preach, ſaying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

When our Lord here ſays, *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*, it muſt be obſerved, that it is preciſely the ſame language which he made uſe of when he began his miniſtry, and that it plainly relates to the ſame event. And it is equally evident, that when, at the cloſe of the preceding chapter, he is deſcribed as *going through every city and village, preaching the Goſpel*, or good news, *of the kingdom*, that is, of *the kingdom of the Meſſiah*, he was performing the ſame office which his Apoſtles are here commiſſioned to execute.

In giving his Diſciples a commiſſion of ſuch importance, it was evidently neceſſary that our Lord ſhould give them ſuch particular directions for the regulation of their conduct, as the nature of the ſervice in which they were engaged, and the peculiar circumſtances of the times required. This he does from the ſeventh to the ſixteenth verſe,

verſe, which he concludes by telling them, that it would require the utmoſt exerciſe of their wiſdom and prudence to diſcharge the duties of their office with ſucceſs! *Behold*, ſays he, *I ſend you forth as ſheep in the midſt of wolves. Be ye therefore wiſe as ſerpents, and harmleſs as doves!* In the ſeventeenth and following verſes, he informs them of the great difficulties and hardſhips which they would have to encounter, in the faithful diſcharge of their commiſſion. *But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they ſhall ſcourge you in their ſynagogues, and ye ſhall be brought before Governors and Kings for my ſake, for a teſtimony to them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what you ſhall ſpeak; for it is not you who ſpeak, but the ſpirit of your Father which ſpeaketh in you. Moreover the brother ſhall deliver up the brother to death, and the father his child; and children ſhall riſe up againſt their parents, and cauſe them to be put to death.* And to ſhew, in the ſtrongeſt manner poſſible, the violence of the oppoſition which they muſt expect to meet with, he adds, in the twenty-ſecond verſe—*Ye ſhall be hated by all men for my name's ſake.*

It

It would be extremely difficult, if not impoſſible, for a perſon who does not fully enter into the ſentiments and prejudices of the Diſciples of Jeſus, upon the ſubject of the *coming of the Meſſiah*, to imagine the extreme ſurprize and aſtoniſhment which this prediction of the ſufferings which they were to encounter, muſt have produced upon their minds; for though they could not perhaps expect to be entirely exempted from ſufferings, in the full attainment of the great object of their ambition; yet neither could they have entertained any idea of ſuch mighty oppoſition, at leaſt from their own countrymen, as to be delivered up to the great councils of their own nation, and ſcourged in their *ſynagogues*, for proclaiming tidings which were equally grateful, and equally expected, by the whole Jewiſh nation as by themſelves. Our Lord therefore being fully aware of the effect which his prediction of ſuch mighty and ſuch unexpected oppoſition, from their own countrymen, muſt have had upon their minds, thought it abſolutely neceſſary, beſides the general aſſurance which he gave them, in the nineteenth and twentieth verſes, of aſſiſtance from above, to offer to their attention ſome farther

farther conſiderations of the moſt conſolatory kind, to enable them, with becoming fortitude, to bear the troubles to which they might be expoſed in the diſcharge of their duty.

The firſt conſolatory conſideration which our Lord offered to his Diſciples was, what could not but have a conſiderable effect upon their minds—that by perſeverance they would not fail, ultimately, of ſucceſs. v. 22. *He that ſhall endure to the end ſhall be ſaved*; plainly intimating that they muſt not expect the attainment of the great object of their wiſhes, without faithfully and diligently performing the duties, which the nature of the ſervice in which they were engaged, particularly required, whatever troubles they might meet with, in the execution of that ſervice. Another conſideration of a conſoling nature, which he offered to them was, what could not fail to have its due weight upon their minds, under ſuch circumſtances, that in very preſſing exigencies, it would be lawful, and even neceſſary, to ſave themſelves from the impending dangers to which they might be expoſed, by flying from them. v. 23. *But when they perſecute you in this city, flee ye into another.* But

neither of theſe conſiderations would, of themſelves, have been ſufficient to have animated the Diſciples of Jeſus, to endure the troubles which he had taught them to expect, without having their minds particularly directed to *the time* when they ſhould have their hopes of the attainment of the great object of all their expectations realized; when the kingdom of heaven ſhould no longer be *at hand*, but actually *come*. Our Lord appears to have been thoroughly ſenſible of this, and therefore he not only tells them that they ſhould ultimately be ſucceſsful, and that, in the mean time, it would be lawful, in caſes of imminent danger, to flee from one city to another, but he immediately adds, in this connection, and that in terms the moſt pointed and deciſive, that *they ſhould not have gone over the cities of Iſrael*—they ſhould not have fully completed their miſſion of announcing the approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom, ere they would be fully ſatisfied that their wiſhes of his coming were fully accompliſhed! *When they perſecute you in this city, flee to another; for verily I ſay unto you, Ye ſhall not have gone over the cities of Iſrael till the Son of Man be come.* Such an aſſurance

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as this, to men whoſe views were ſo ſtrongly directed towards the expectation of a Meſſiah, who, in their opinion, was ultimately to lead them to conqueſt and to empire, was abſolutely neceſſary; and it is highly probable that, if it had not been given, they would have forſaken him, notwithſtanding the high regard which they entertained for the peculiar excellence of his perſonal character!

It is not eaſy to imagine that the Diſciples of Jeſus could, in ſuch circumſtances as are here deſcribed, have entertained any other idea of *the coming* here mentioned, than *the coming of the Meſſiah*, or of the kingdom which he had announced to be at hand; for to that *coming* their whole attention was originally directed, and they were themſelves inveſted with a commiſſion, as related in this very chapter, for this expreſs purpoſe, to inform their countrymen of its approach. *As ye go, preach, ſaying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.* And here our Lord tells them, for their encouragement in the diſcharge of their duty, that they ſhould *not have gone over the cities of Iſrael till the Son of Man come.* That the Diſciples underſtood this phraſe, *the coming of the*

Son of Man, as deſcriptive of *the coming of the Meſſiah*, ſeems to be pretty evident, from the queſtion of our Lord, in the ſixteenth chapter of this Evangeliſt; for upon his aſking his Diſciples—*Whom do men ſay that I, the Son of Man, am*; they immediately replied—*Thou art the Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah, *the Son of the living God*. What can deſerve the name of demonſtration of the true meaning of a Writer, if this, and indeed if the whole of the context, does not? Or how can any other ſenſe be put upon *the coming of the Son of Man*, than *the coming* of the Meſſiah, without violating all the rules of good writing, and rendering it impoſſible to aſcertain the Writer's meaning!

To theſe arguments which our Lord made uſe of to ſupport the minds of the Diſciples, under the difficulties and hardſhips to which he had aſſured them they would be expoſed, in the execution of their commiſſion, he adds another, which, if not of equal force with the laſt, was at leaſt admirably adapted to reconcile them to their ſituation, however hard it might appear to them; for, in the twenty-fourth verſe, he tells them, in terms ſufficiently ſignificant, that he had himſelf, at leaſt

equal,

equal, if not ſuperior difficulties to encounter. *The diſciple is not above his maſter, nor the ſervant above his lord. It is enough for the diſciple that he be as his maſter, and the ſervant as his lord. If they have called the maſter of the houſe Beelzebub, how much more,* is it to be expected, that *they will call them of his houſhold? Fear them not therefore.*

If ever clearneſs and perſpicuity were to be found in any writing, either antient or modern, ſurely this has a juſt claim to it! What reaſoning can be more cloſe, or better adapted to the ſituation of the Diſciples of Jeſus, at the moment of their ſetting out to execute the commiſſion with which they were inveſted? And, at the ſame time that it ſtands diſtinguiſhed for perſpicuity, it carries, in every part of it, ſuch unequivocal marks of *genuine Hiſtory*, as muſt leave, on the mind of him who conſiders it with attention, no doubt of its authenticity, nor ſuſpicion that any other meaning can poſſibly be affixed to the whole diſcourſe! Nor muſt it be forgotten, that while it ſtands recommended for theſe moſt eſſential qualities of good writing, it affords the moſt pleaſing and the moſt affecting traits of the benevolence and humanity of our Lord's

character, in affording to his followers every conſolation and encouragement which the peculiarity of their ſituation demanded!

It is unneceſſary to the purpoſe of this enquiry, to take any notice of the remaining part of this chapter, farther than to obſerve, that it plainly contains a continuation of the ſame ſubject, with additional directions how the Diſciples were to conduct themſelves, in the arduous employment which they had undertaken, and the moſt weighty and awful conſiderations ſuggeſted, of the extreme danger of preferring even the deareſt intereſts of this life, to the ſuperior duty which they owed to him. v. 32. *Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before men, him will I confeſs alſo before my Father who is in heaven. But whoſoever ſhall deny me before men, him will I alſo deny before my Father who is in heaven. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me: and he that loveth ſon or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his croſs and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life ſhall loſe it, and he that loſeth his life for my ſake, ſhall find it.*

The judicious Reader will obſerve, that what is here aſſerted by our Lord, is perfectly

fectly conſiſtent with the ſoundeſt reaſoning; as it proceeds upon the fundamental principle of all true Religion, that *God is to be obeyed rather than man.* And that the Diſciples might conduct themſelves upon this principle, he directs them to look up to God, as the fountain of all his claims. v. 40. *He that receiveth you, receiveth me, and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that ſent me.* q. d. You have received a commiſſion from me, in conſequence only of my having received a prior commiſſion from my Father. To him, therefore, you are ultimately to be accountable for the manner in which you ſhall diſcharge the commiſſion which you have received immediately from me! For their farther encouragement to be faithful to him, he adds, in the forty-firſt verſe, *He that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a prophet, ſhall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man, in the name of a righteous man, ſhall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoſoever ſhall give to drink, to one of theſe little ones, a cup of cold water only, in the name of a Diſciple, verily I ſay unto you, he ſhall in no wiſe loſe his reward.*

From this view of the chapter under conſideration it appears, that the whole of

it is employed in laying down rules for the regulation of the conduct of the Disciples, in the execution of their commission to preach the glad tidings of the approach of the kingdom of heaven. And this is confirmed by the Evangelist, in the beginning of the following chapter; for it is said, that *when Jesus had made an end of commanding*, or rather of giving directions to *his twelve Disciples, he departed from thence, to teach and to preach in their cities.*

The second verse of this chapter commences with an account of a message which John the Baptist, while under confinement, sent to Jesus, in consequence of his hearing of the miraculous works which the latter had performed. *Now when John had heard in the prison, the works of Christ, he sent two of his Disciples, and said unto him—Art thou he that should come*, whom, as Jews, we are anxiously expecting is now about to appear, *or are we to expect another?* This message of the Baptist is one among many proofs of the general expectation of the coming of the Messiah, at the time when Jesus appeared. And his answer is well worthy of particular notice, as it clearly shews his cautious manner of conducting himself, when

when queſtioned concerning the nature of his character, even by thoſe to whom, it might be thought, that he might have expreſſed himſelf more frankly. Without directly anſwering their queſtion, he refers them to the many wonderful works which they had either been eye-witneſſes of his performing, or which had been reported to them, by the teſtimony of others. v. 4. 5. *Go and ſhew John again thoſe things which ye do hear and ſee. The blind receive their ſight—the lame walk—the lepers are cleanſed—the deaf hear—the dead are raiſed up—and*, he adds, *the poor have the Goſpel*, that is the good tidings of the kingdom of the Meſſiah, *preached to them.* The following ſentence ſeems to be particularly worthy of attention, as it has a manifeſt alluſion to the prejudices of the Jews, upon the ſubject of the coming of the Meſſiah. v. 6. *Bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me.* Happy is the man who ſhall not be offended at my preſent humble appearance, but ſhall own me to be the perſon which my works declare me to be, notwithſtanding I have none of thoſe worldly honors and emoluments to beſtow, which are generally conſidered as in-

inſeparably connected with the coming of the Meſſiah!

The paſſage to which the Reader's attention is next requeſted, upon the ſubject of *the coming of Chriſt*, is in the ſixteenth chapter of the ſame Evangeliſt, where our Lord, upon his entrance into the country which was under the juriſdiction of Philip, aſked his Diſciples what was the public opinion concerning him? v. 13. *Whom do men ſay that I, the Son of Man, am?* Their reply was—*Some ſay that thou art John the Baptiſt, ſome Elias, and others Jeremiah, or one of the Prophets.* Our Lord then aſked them their own opinion of the nature of his character. v. 15. *But whom ſay ye that I am?* to which the Apoſtle Peter (probably in the name of the reſt) without heſitation, replied—*Thou art the Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah, *the Son of the living God.*

If the ſtate of things, at the time this converſation took place, is conſidered, it required no ſmall exerciſe of faith, to make this noble confeſſion; for there were *then* no ſigns of the nature of thoſe which they had affixed to the character of the Meſſiah, which could lead them to think their favorite

vorite idea of a worldly kingdom was about to be realized. And it is particularly worthy of notice, from their account of the ſentiments of the people at large, that they were ſingular in their opinion upon this head; ſome ſaying that he was John the Baptiſt, ſome that he was Elias, and others Jeremiah, or one of the Prophets; but none that he was the Chriſt, or the Meſſiah. This has been thought extraordinary, and it has been conſidered as not eaſily to be accounted for, from the known and acknowledged ſentiments which the Diſciples of Jeſus then held; which certainly were not, at this time, materially different from the reſt of their countrymen, concerning the nature of his character. But ſurely there is nothing contrary to probability, in the ſuppoſition that they might believe Jeſus to be the Meſſiah, though he had not yet given them any of thoſe diſtinguiſhed proofs of his ſuſtaining that character, which they had affixed to it. They had heard him ſay, that *the kingdom of heaven*, or of the Meſſiah, was *at hand*. They had themſelves received a commiſſion to announce its approach; they had ſeen him work many miracles, which very fully evinced

evinced that he was an extraordinary perſon, and from an intimate acquaintance with him, they entertained no doubt of the perfect integrity of his character. Add to all this, that they had had frequent opportunities of obſerving the ſuperior excellence and ſublimity of his inſtructions, and it will be found, in no reſpect, unnatural or improbable, that they ſhould believe him to ſuſtain that character, though he had given them none of thoſe proofs of his Meſſiahſhip, which they, in common with the reſt of their countrymen, had conſidered as inſeparable from that character! Beſides, it ſhould be obſerved, that by their following him with ſuch unſhaken perſeverance, they ſufficiently declared, that they expected the time would one day come, when he would give them the fulleſt ſatisfaction that he was the Meſſiah!

But perhaps this premature declaration of St. Peter, as it has been termed, that Jeſus was the Meſſiah, is beſt accounted for, by our Lord himſelf, in the eulogium which, upon that occaſion, he pronounced upon him, and fully juſtifies the ſuppoſition which has been juſt made, viz. that his excellent inſtructions had drawn from Peter this

this noble confeſſion. *Bleſſed art thou Simon Bar-jona; for fleſh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.* As if he had ſaid: Had you conſulted fleſh and blood only, your worldly prejudices and ſecular views, you would never, under the preſent circumſtances, have acknowledged me to be *the Meſſiah*; but the doctrines which I have taught you, in the name of my Father, have plainly influenced your judgment upon this occaſion, contrary to all human appearances, and extorted from you a confeſſion, which no other conſideration could have induced you to have made!

This confeſſion of St. Peter, was ſo contrary to the general ideas which *then* prevailed among the Jews, concerning the nature of the Meſſiah's character, that our Lord, whoſe prudent attention to the circumſtances of things, appears never, for a moment, to have deſerted him, thought it neceſſary to give his Diſciples a ſtrict charge, not to tell any one that he was *the Meſſiah*. *Then charged he his Diſciples, that they ſhould tell no man that he was Jeſus* THE CHRIST, or the Meſſiah. This caution was perfectly agreeable to our Lord's general conduct, and

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to his own precept, to be *wiſe as ſerpents, and harmleſs as doves*; and it was for this obvious reaſon, abſolutely neceſſary, that if once ſuch an opinion ſhould be propagated, it might not only have created popular tumults and inſurrections in his favor, which he, at all times, moſt carefully avoided, but might have entirely defeated the great and important purpoſes of his miſſion!

But our Lord did not ſtop here. He not only thought it neceſſary to charge his Diſciples to tell no one that he was *the Meſſiah*; but as he had, by his decided approbation of St. Peter's confeſſion of his being the Meſſiah, acknowledged that he actually ſuſtained that character; he plainly foreſaw the abſolute neceſſity of checking any worldly views, which might now begin to operate, with redoubled force, upon the minds, even of the Diſciples themſelves, with reſpect to their expectation of their beloved maſter's coming in that character! For this purpoſe it was, with the moſt conſummate wiſdom, that he choſe this opportunity of informing them of the ſufferings which he himſelf was to undergo. *From that time forth*, ſays the Evangeliſt, *i. e.* from the time when St. Peter made his noble

noble confeſſion that he was the Meſſiah; or from the time when he charged them not to tell any one that he ſuſtained that character, *began Jeſus to ſhew unto his Diſciples, how that he muſt go to Jeruſalem, and ſuffer many things of the Elders, and chief Prieſts, and Scribes, and be killed, and be raiſed the third day.**

When our Lord, as hath already been ſeen, in the tenth chapter of this Evangeliſt, had forewarned his Diſciples of the great troubles to which they might be expoſed, in

* Our Lord having predicted his own ſufferings and death, which afterwards were moſt exactly accompliſhed, affords a ſtrong proof of itſelf, of his being a true Prophet of God; but when this prediction is combined with that of the antient Prophets foretelling the ſame events, they form together a body of evidence, which is not to be reſiſted by thoſe who are judges of the nature of evidence!

The judicious Reader cannot but be pleaſed with the obſervations of Mr. Kett upon this ſubject, in his Hiſtory, the Interpreter of Prophecy. p. 227. to p. 235. "So clear "and full," ſays he, "are the declarations of Iſaiah, rela- "tive to the coming of the Meſſiah, the nature of his king- "dom, and the benefits reſulting to mankind from its "eſtabliſhment, that he has, with great propriety, been "called the Evangelical Prophet. One of his predictions "in particular can never be too frequently brought forward, "as an inſtance of a revelation of the Divine Will, directed "to one uniform courſe of circumſtances and events. The "regularity of its plan is unbroken: it is complete in its "various parts, and it ſtands detached from other ſubjects. "It is a ſtriking picture, of which the outlines are ſtrongly "marked,

in the execution of their commiſſion *to preach the glad tidings of the kingdom of God*, the Evangeliſt gives not the ſlighteſt intimation of their having expoſtulated with Jeſus upon the occaſion; though he, at the ſame time, told them they were ſuch as awaited himſelf, and for this reaſon, probably, that they could not, upon their own principles, expect that the purpoſes of his Meſſiahſhip could be attained, without both their maſter and themſelves being expoſed to ſome difficulties! But, no ſooner did he

" marked, and the colours are natural and lively. The " form of expreſſion is remarkable; for the Prophet ſpeaks " of things to come, as if they were either preſent or paſt. " Fully occupied by the importance of his ſubject, and " carried foward to diſtant times, he flies over the interval " between the prediction and its fulfilment, and writes in " the manner of an exact and faithful hiſtorian. Iſaiah liii. " 3d to the 13th."

Having quoted the paſſage here referred to, at full length, Mr. Kett ſays, " This Prophecy is an exact anticipation of " ſome of the moſt remarkable circumſtances relating to the " life and death of Chriſt, and the great benefits of his " Paſſion." And to prove that it was literally accompliſhed in our Saviour, Mr. K. brings together the parallel paſſages in the prophetic and in the hiſtoric writings, and then ſays, " Struck by the exact application of this paſſage to the " character and ſufferings of Chriſt, the devout Eunuch of " Ethiopia liſtened to the explanatory narrative of St. Philip, " and became a zealous convert to the faith. In this in- " ſtance the power of Prophecy, as one great evidence of " the truth of Chriſtianity, was eminently diſplayed."

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enter into farther particulars, and foretell, in a cloſe connection with an acknowledgement made by themſelves, that he was *the Meſſiah*, that ſuch ſufferings awaited him, as would terminate in a violent, ignominious, and cruel Death, and that from the hands of their own countrymen—from the Elders, the chief Prieſts, and the Scribes, than they immediately took the alarm! And well they might; for theſe ſufferings, and from ſuch a quarter too, were ſo totally incompatible with the ideas which they had affixed to the Meſſiah's character, that they could no longer keep ſilence! And Peter, who, upon all occaſions, ſeems to have been moſt forward to expreſs his attachment to his maſter, immediately exclaimed—*Be it far from thee, Lord, this ſhall not be unto thee.* The Evangeliſts have not failed to mark the extreme aſtoniſhment of the Diſciples, upon this intereſting ſubject, in the moſt pointed manner; for in the next chapter, upon the ſame ſubject being renewed, St. Matthew ſays, v. 25. they were ελυπηθησαν σφοδρα filled with extreme grief at the news. St. Mark's expreſſion, ch. ix. 32. is ſtill more forcible; for it very ſtrongly expreſſes the extreme perplexity into which they

were thrown, in conſequence of this prediction, ηγνοουν το ρημα—they knew not what to make of the matter. And St. Luke has exactly the ſame ſentiment with St. Mark, with this addition, that *it was* παρακεκαλυμενον *hid from them*, or ſo wrapt up in darkneſs, that they could not perceive what it meant; that is, their prejudices concerning the *nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, plainly hindered them from comprehending how ſuch an event could be compatible with it.

The evidence that the prejudices of the Diſciples were the real cauſes of their aſtoniſhment, and indeed could not but be ſo, it would be impoſſible to doubt, even if our Saviour had not pointed it out; but his reply to Peter renders it abſolutely deciſive. ch. xvi. 23. *Get thee behind me Satan, thou art an offence to me; for thou ſavoreſt not* τα του θεου *the things of God*, or ſpiritual things, *but* τα του Ανθρωπου *the things of men*, or temporal things. St. Luke likewiſe gives a very ſtrong proof that prejudice was the real cauſe of their not underſtanding our Lord; for upon his ſaying, ch. ix. 45. that they underſtood not this ſaying—that it was hid from them, and that they perceived it not, he adds, in the verſe immediately following

ing—*Then there aroſe a reaſoning among them, which of them ſhould be greateſt, i. e.* which of them ſhould fill the moſt exalted ſtations in *the Meſſiah's kingdom.* The ſame contention is recorded upon another occaſion, near the cloſe of our Lord's life, by the ſame Evangeliſt. ch. xxii. 24. *There was alſo,* ſays he, *a ſtrife among them, which of them ſhould be accounted the greateſt.*

It being indiſputable, from our Lord's own account, that his Diſciples were *chiefly* influenced by views of worldly ambition, when they ſo ſtrongly remonſtrated with him on the ſubject of the ſufferings which he told them he ſhould have to undergo—what line of conduct was it natural for him, upon ſuch an occaſion, to purſue? What line of conduct did he actually purſue? Why preciſely that which he had purſued, when he gave them their commiſſion to preach the glad tidings of the approach of *the Meſſiah's kingdom*; for as he there told them, as has been noticed at large, of the troubles which they would have to encounter, in the diſcharge of their duty, and at the ſame time plainly hinted, that the ſame, or even greater troubles, awaited himſelf; ſo he ſays here, v. 24. *If any man will*

come after me, if any man will be my Diſciple, *let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs and follow me.* As if he had ſaid—The troubles and ſufferings which I have told you were coming upon me, have given you great offence; but I now tell you, that if you will follow me with fidelity, you muſt deny yourſelves, by giving up thoſe worldly gratifications which have got ſuch a ſtrong aſcendancy in your minds, in your expectation of *the coming of the Meſſiah*, and you muſt take up your croſs, as I do *mine*, and muſt expect to meet with the ſame, or ſimilar ſufferings, in the diſcharge of your duty. He then ſays, v. 25. *Whoſoever will ſave his life*, by meanly ſhrinking from his duty, on account of any ſufferings that may befal him, *ſhall loſe it*, and *whoſoever ſhall loſe his life for my ſake, ſhall find it.* But how find it? Why, ſays St. John, in a paſſage which ſeems to be an accurate paraphraſe of this—*He ſhall keep*, or rather preſerve *it unto life eternal.* In the two following verſes, the ſuperior advantage of preferring duty to intereſt, however extenſive, is ſet in the ſtrongeſt light which the power of language can poſſibly convey; for, ſays our Lord—*What is a man profited, if he ſhall gain*

gain the whole world and loſe his own ſoul? Or what ſhall a man give in exchange for his ſoul? No equivalent can be found, in the whole univerſe, equal to it in value! And as a confirmation of the ſtrong caſe which our Lord had put in the two preceding verſes, he adds, v. 27. *For the Son of Man ſhall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he ſhall reward every man according to his works.*

Nothing can be more evident than that the attention of the Diſciples is here directed to a ſtate of happineſs, in a future world, as the reward of any ſufferings which they might be ſubjected to, in conſequence of their faithful adherence to him, as infinitely more worthy of their regard, than any acquiſitions, however ſplendid and extenſive, of a merely worldly nature. No reaſoning can be imagined more cloſely connected, or better calculated to check the too eager expectations of the Diſciples of Jeſus, with reſpect to *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, than the whole of this diſcourſe; none could be more fitted to reconcile them to the troubles which they might have to undergo, in conſequence of their attachment to him; for it ſhewed

them, very ſtrongly, his own determined contempt of danger, and conſequently had a very powerful tendency to fortify their own minds to meet the calamities which they might have to ſhare in common with him. *The Diſciple is not*, as he had formerly ſaid, *above his maſter, nor the ſervant above his Lord. It is enough for the Diſciple that he be as his maſter, and the ſervant as his Lord.*

Had our Lord's addreſs to his Diſciples finiſhed here, all would have been perfectly intelligible to the plaineſt underſtanding; but however much to the purpoſe it might have been, ſtill it was not *alone* ſufficient to ſatisfy their minds of what they moſt of all wanted to be informed. They knew that *the Meſſiah* was *to come*, and they ſtill continued to expect *his coming*, with all the eagerneſs, and, at the ſame time, with all the prejudices with the reſt of their countrymen. Whatever difficulties and perplexities therefore they might have in accounting for events, ſo foreign to their expectation, as Jeſus had been teaching them would certainly take place; yet they could not, and it is abundantly evident, in fact, that they did not renounce their hopes of *his coming* in that character. They had, even in this very

very diſcourſe, as has been ſeen, declared that he was *the Meſſiah, the Son of the living God*, and he had, in the ſtrongeſt terms, expreſſed his approbation of that declaration! Troubles and ſufferings, in the accompliſhment of the duties of his office, as *the Meſſiah*, were moſt certainly not incompatible, even upon their own principles, with that character, though they had no idea of ſuch ſufferings as Jeſus had predicted, till he told them of them: ſtill it was abſolutely neceſſary, amidſt ſuch grating predictions, to ſupport their expectations, and to interweave with them aſſurances that thoſe expectations would be realized. Theſe aſſurances were ſo neceſſary to complete their ſatisfaction upon the ſubject, that all other arguments, however forcible, would plainly have been thrown away upon them. Our Lord was perfectly aware of this, and therefore, with the utmoſt propriety, he ſums up the whole, by an aſſurance of *his coming* in the character, not of the judge of the world, but of *the Meſſiah*, and that in terms of the greateſt ſolemnity and ſtrength of language. v. 28. *Verily I ſay unto you, there be ſome ſtanding here who ſhall not taſte of death till they ſee the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*

It is impoſſible to doubt that the former of theſe advents, mentioned in the twenty-ſeventh verſe, is cloſely connected with our Saviour's reaſoning, which was intended to reconcile the Diſciples to the ſufferings which he had informed them were to befal himſelf. And the evidence that the latter advent was connected with the converſation which gave riſe to the ſubſequent diſcourſe, appears to be no leſs clear; for it was as eſſentially neceſſary to confirm them in that faith which they had ſo nobly avowed, namely, that Jeſus was *the Meſſiah*, the *Son of the living God*. Nothing, it may be preſumed, could poſſibly have prevented the perceiving this connection, but the intervention of the argument of our Lord, to reconcile his Diſciples to the events which he had predicted were to happen to him. But ſurely the rules of ſound reaſoning will juſtify his returning, after having ſaid what he deemed ſufficient to attain that object, to the ſubject which firſt occupied his attention? What that was, will not, and, indeed, cannot be diſputed. And a cloſe attention cannot fail, it may be preſumed, after what has been ſaid, to enable the judicious Reader to perceive, that the laſt

laſt verſe has an immediate relation, not to the verſe immediately preceding, but to that ſubject, and to that only; for he there aſſerts, that they ſhall ſee *the Son of Man, the Meſſiah, coming in his kingdom*, and that they might have the moſt diſtinct and correct ideas, both of the nature and time of *his coming*, he expreſsly informs them, that *there were ſome then ſtanding there who ſhould not taſte of death till they ſaw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*; which is clearly diſtinct from *his coming with his angels, to give to every man according to his works*; the former being the language which he uſed to denote *the coming of the Meſſiah*—the latter of *his coming* finally to judge the world.

In the chapters which are parallel to this, under conſideration, there ſeems to be nothing worthy of particular notice, but what tends, in the ſtrongeſt manner, to confirm the ſenſe which is here given. St. Matthew ſays—*there are ſome ſtanding here who ſhall not taſte of death till they ſee the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.* In St. Mark, our Lord's reaſoning, and the occaſion which gave riſe to it, are preciſely of the ſame import, though the verſe which concludes the ſubject is, by a ſtrange inatten-

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tion, or miſconception of the Tranſlator, made to begin a new chapter, which has a direct tendency to miſlead the Reader! Mark viii. 34. *Whoſoever will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs and follow me.* v. 35. *For whoſoever will ſave his life, ſhall loſe it; but whoſoever ſhall loſe his life for my ſake and the Goſpels, i. e.* for the ſake of the good news which I have announced, *the ſame ſhall ſave it.* v. 36. *For what ſhall it profit a man, if he ſhall gain the whole world and loſe his own ſoul?* v. 37. *Or what ſhall a man give in exchange for his ſoul?* v. 38. *Whoſoever therefore ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and ſinful generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of Man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* ch. ix. 1. *And he ſaid unto them, Verily I ſay unto you, that there be ſome ſtanding here, who ſhall not taſte of death till they have ſeen the kingdom of God come with power.* St. Luke's account is as follows. ch. ix. 23. *And he ſaid to them all— If any man will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs daily, and follow me.* v. 24. *For whoſoever will ſave his life ſhall loſe it; but whoſoever will loſe his life for my ſake, the ſame ſhall ſave it.* v. 25. *For what*

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is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world and loſe himſelf, or be caſt away? For whoſoever ſhall be aſhamed of me and of my words, of him ſhall the Son of Man be aſhamed, when he ſhall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels. v. 27. *But*, or nevertheleſs, *I tell you of a truth, there be ſome ſtanding here who ſhall not taſte of death till they ſee the kingdom of God.*

Here the judicious and attentive Reader is requeſted to obſerve, that in all the three Evangeliſts, our Lord's reaſoning is, in ſubſtance, exactly the ſame, and the occaſion which gave riſe to it is ſo notoriouſly ſo, that there is no neceſſity for troubling him with the repetition of it: And the very variations of the concluding verſe of each of the Evangeliſts, ſtrongly confirm the ſenſe here contended for. St. Matthew ſays *they ſhould ſee the Son of Man coming in his kingdom:* St. Mark, that *they ſhould ſee the kingdom of God come with power:* and St. Luke, that *they ſhould ſee the kingdom of God.* If this language be underſtood, of *the coming of the Meſſiah*, which it is allowed on all hands, at that time, engroſſed the thoughts of the Diſciples of Jeſus, and which, it is hardly to be conceived, they could underſtand in

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any other ſenſe; all is natural and eaſy, and moſt exactly coincides with his original language, and with that language which he had taught them to make uſe of, when he firſt gave them their commiſſion! But if *a ſecond coming*, after the Aſcenſion of Jeſus, and that while ſome who were then living, be intended, how was it poſſible for the Diſciples to underſtand him? how reconcile the two advents with each other? But they, it may be ſaid, did not always underſtand him. True, they did not. But the queſtion is, whether, with the ſentiments which they avowedly entertained, they could poſſibly imagine that the great purpoſes of the Meſſiah's *firſt coming* ſhould have been aſcertained to their ſatisfaction, before it had been acknowledged by themſelves to have taken place! Could the Diſciples of Jeſus have underſtood him as predicting *the end of the world*, in the ſtrict ſenſe of that phraſe, at ſuch an early period, there can be no doubt that they muſt have forſaken him, as *an Impoſtor*, as not anſwering, in the moſt eſſential and important reſpects, the true characteriſtics of the Meſſiahſhip; for, if *the coming* mentioned in theſe paſſages of the ſeveral Evangeliſts, means *his coming to judge*

judge the world, as has been contended; how, even in the eſtimation, and upon the principles of the Diſciples *themſelves*, were the prophecies of the eſtabliſhment of the Meſſiah's kingdom, over all the kingdoms of the earth, to be accompliſhed? In every view, therefore, in which the ſubject can fairly be conſidered, the ſuppoſition that this was our Lord's meaning, in theſe paſſages, is moſt prepoſterous and abſurd, and countenanced by no one circumſtance of probability, or juſt reaſoning! Upon the contrary, the connection and occaſion of the diſcourſe—the declaration that Jeſus was *the Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah, *the Son of the living God*, and Jeſus's approbation of that declaration, followed by his prediction of his own ſufferings and death, naturally, and, indeed, neceſſarily led him to aſſure them, that notwithſtanding theſe events, ſo contrary to their expectations, their hopes of *his coming*, as *the Meſſiah*, ſhould not be diſappointed; but that *ſome of thoſe who were then preſent, ſhould not taſte of death till they ſaw him coming in his kingdom.*

If the view which has now been given of the tenth and ſixteenth chapters of this Evangeliſt, be perfectly accurate and ſatisfactory

factory to the judicious and attentive Reader; it will appear that the conduct of our Lord, upon theſe different occaſions, was at once a proof of the ſtrict integrity of his character, and of his extreme ſenſibility to the peculiar delicacy of the ſituation of his Diſciples, owing to the ſtrong prejudices which they had imbibed, *concerning the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, and of the neceſſity of his adapting his inſtructions to thoſe prejudices! With the moſt heroic fortitude and intrepidity, he apprized them of events which were totally incompatible with all their ideas of *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, and, at the ſame time, with the moſt diſtinguiſhed tenderneſs and humanity, he endeavoured, by every intereſting conſideration, to lead them to the moſt enlarged views of the great object of his miſſion—to correct their prejudices and, above all, to afford them all the conſolation and encouragement which the peculiarity of their ſituation required; in the one caſe telling them, that they *ſhould not have gone over the cities of Iſrael, till the Son of Man came*; and in the other, that *there were ſome* of thoſe *who were then preſent, who ſhould not taſte of death till*

till they ſaw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

It muſt likewiſe be obſerved, as a ſtill farther proof of the benevolence and humanity of the character of Jeſus, and of the ſuperior wiſdom which directed his conduct, that the painful diſcoveries which he found it neceſſary to unfold to his Diſciples, were gradual, and as *they were able to bear them!* When he firſt gave them their commiſſion to *preach the glad tidings of the kingdom of heaven*, or of the Meſſiah, he told them that they muſt expect to meet with much ill-treatment, and run great hazards in the execution of their office, and that he himſelf ſhould not be exempted from ſimilar troubles. But it was not till they had ſeen him perform the moſt numerous and aſtoniſhing miracles—till they had formed an acquaintance with him ſufficient to engage their affections towards him—till, in ſhort, they were ſo fully ſatisfied of the perfect integrity of his character, as to extort from them a declaration that they believed him to be *the Meſſiah*, that he ventured to give them any explicit and direct information that he was to be the victim of Jewiſh malice, and that he was to die by

their

their hands upon a croſs, as a notorious Malefactor and Impoſtor! How neceſſary this prudent caution was, is moſt evident, from the extreme aſtoniſhment which they *even then* expreſſed, and their utter inability to comprehend what he could poſſibly mean by ſuch a declaration! It may therefore reaſonably be preſumed, that if it had been made before, it would have totally overwhelmed them with deſpair, and have induced them entirely to have forſaken him!

If this cautious and prudent conduct was neceſſary upon theſe occaſions, it certainly could not be leſs ſo, in the diſcoveries which Jeſus had yet to make to them; for what could have been more directly oppoſite to all their deep rooted prejudices, concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, than his prediction of the ruin of their Temple, the entire deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the ſubſequent diſperſion of their whole nation? The effect which an early and premature diſcovery of theſe calamitous events muſt have had upon their minds, cannot poſſibly be doubted! Our Lord, therefore, knowing how extremely ungrateful theſe awful predictions could not but be to them, ſeems to have been induced, in the

the earlier part of his miniſtry, to have communicated them by diſtant hints and obſcure intimations, and chiefly by the aid of parable.* And it is highly probable, that he poſtponed a full and explicit prediction of theſe fearful calamities, till towards the cloſe of his life, that their minds might be the better fortified to give him a patient hearing, upon a ſubject ſo truly diſagreeable to them, and ſo contradictory to all their expectations. And when he did communicate them, his humane regard to their prejudices is, evidently, as conſpicuous as in the caſes which have been already ſtated; for he interweaves with them ſuch aſſurances of *his coming*, and ſuch particular cautions to beware of deceivers, who ſhould aſſume the character of *the Meſſiah*, as the peculiar delicacy and difficulties of their ſituation, ſo urgently required!

* Many of our Lord's parables have an evident relation to that melancholy event, and were probably delivered at an early period of his miniſtry, when it would have been inconſiſtent with the great ends of it, to have been more explicit. In the following places, our Lord uſes the parabolic method in ſpeaking of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. Luke xiii. 6. 29. Matt. xxii. 1-7. Luke xiv. 17-24. Matt. xxi. 33-46. Mark xii. 1-12. Luke xx. 9-19. Luke xix. 11-27.

The prediction of the ruin of their Temple, (in which that of their country was neceſſarily involved) was in conſequence of their taking a ſurvey * of its magnificent buildings; the deſtruction of which, our Lord told them, would be ſo complete, that there ſhould not *be left one ſtone upon another, which ſhould not be thrown down.*† This awful

* The Survey of the Temple, according to our tranſlation, produced this queſtion from our Lord—*See ye not all theſe things?* But perhaps the original rather expreſſes *a caution* than *a queſtion—Look not on all theſe things, i. e.* with exceſſive veneration and delight, as you have hitherto been accuſtomed to do—*for verily I ſay unto you, there ſhall not be left one ſtone upon another which ſhall not be thrown down.* This gives an energy to our Lord's prediction, which is ſtrongly ſupported by the narration in St. Luke, in the parallel chapter, which is thus expreſſed—*As for theſe things which ye behold, the days will come in which there ſhall not be one ſtone upon another which ſhall not be thrown down.*

† " Not leaving one ſtone upon another," ſays the Biſhop of Waterford, " is a proverbial and hyperbolical way of " ſpeaking, to denote very exemplary deſtruction." Dr. Jortin, ſpeaking of the Temple at Jeruſalem, ſays, " it was " ſo magnificent, that it was eſteemed, for art and beauty, " one of the wonders of the world; whence it was natural " to expect that the Romans, according to their uſual " cuſtom, amidſt their conqueſts, would endeavour to pre- " ſerve it ſafe and entire. And Joſephus tells us, that " Titus laboured with all his power to ſave it; but that " his ſoldiers, as if moved by a divine impulſe, would not " hearken to his poſitive and repeated orders, but ſet fire " to every part of it, till it was entirely conſumed, and the " ſoil on which it ſtood was ploughed up, and not one ſtone " left on another." See Jortin's Remarks on Eccles. Hiſt. vol. i. p. 30.

pre-

prediction, very naturally, led the Diſciples of Jeſus to enquire *when theſe things ſhould be*, and if they muſt be, for that, as was before obſerved,* is evidently the elipſis to be ſupplied—*what ſhall be the ſign of thy coming?* Thus far all the three Evangeliſts agree; but St. Matthew has an additional queſtion —*and of the end of the world?* The ſurprize and aſtoniſhment of the Diſciples at our Lord's prediction, is ſufficiently obvious; but, of the preciſe meaning of theſe queſtions, together with the meaning of our Lord's reply, there is a conſiderable difference of opinions among Commentators and Divines; ſome referring them to the ſingle event which led the Diſciples to put them—others aſſerting that they relate, not to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem* ONLY, but to *the final judgment of the world*; and others again declaring, that they relate to three perfectly different and diſtinct events. Of this latter opinion is Mr. Kett, who, in his late publication, entitled *Hiſtory the Interpreter of Prophecy*, having quoted St. Mark's account, ſays—" The parallel paſſages of Matthew " and Luke, plainly indicate that this en- " quiry reſpected the deſtruction of Jeru-

* See p 30.

 " ſalem,

" ſalem—the ſecond coming of our Lord, and " the end of the world—events," he adds, " which they poſſibly expected would happen " together, and to which the reply of our " Lord evidently refers."

But, if the enquiry of the Diſciples reſpected theſe ſeveral events, and the reply of our Lord evidently refers to theſe events; it will be extremely difficult, if not impoſſible, to parry the objection of the Hiſtorian of the Riſe and Fall of the Roman Empire, which it is the principal deſign of this work to confute; for it is indiſputable, that whatever event, or events, are deſcribed in theſe parallel chapters, they all agree that they were to happen *in that generation.*

The learned Univerſity Preacher, ſpeaking of the twenty-fourth of Matthew, ſays, it is " a chapter in which a prophecy of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem is entangled with an apparent or a real prediction of the approaching diſſolution of the world." He adds— " The various and oppoſite methods which " Theologians have adopted, to remove an " objection which is too obvious to be over- " looked, form, it muſt be confeſſed, a very " conſiderable preſumption that an adequate " ſolution of the difficulty has not hitherto

" been

" been diſcovered, and that the objection (of " the Hiſtorian) is founded on the baſis of " truth."*

The natural ſuppoſition, one ſhould have imagined, previous to enquiry, would have been, that as our Lord's prediction evidently related *ſolely* to the *deſtruction of Jeruſalem*; the queſtion of the Diſciples would have been confined to this event, and to a ſolicitude to be informed, how ſuch an event could poſſibly be reconciled with his *coming* as *the Meſſiah*. This will be found, in fact, to be the caſe with reſpect to the accounts both of St. Mark and St. Luke; but St. Matthew, as has before been obſerved, it muſt be confeſſed, has an additional queſtion, the preciſe meaning of which, it has not been ſo eaſy to determine.

But whether there be one, two, or three events deſcribed, in the parallel chapters of

* See Edwards's Sermon, p. 18. He adds—" Some in- " terpreters imagine that the prophecy relates entirely to " the ruin of the Jewiſh nation:—others, by the convenient " introduction of types and double ſenſes, preſerve in it a " reference throughout to the conſummation of all things: " —Some have contended that it partly belongs to the " former, and partly to the latter; but what portions of it " are applicable to the one, and what to the other, they " cannot aſcertain:—while a few have ventured to aſſert, " that it repreſents the final judgment as immediately ſub- " ſequent to the Jewiſh calamities."

the Evangeliſts; it will readily be allowed, can only be determined by a critical and minute enquiry into the meaning of theſe queſtions, as they have ſtated them, and of the anſwer or anſwers which our Lord has given to theſe queſtions. It cannot, however, but appear very ſtrange, to imagine that the Diſciples ſhould have expected events ſo extremely heterogeneous, and ſo totally different in their nature, to happen together; for all their ideas upon the ſubject of *the coming of the Meſſiah*, ſo far, at leaſt, as has yet appeared, were moſt certainly in direct contradiction to ſuch an opinion, and that they were not eſſentially changed, till after *the Reſurrection of their Lord*, is demonſtrably evident, from the queſtion which they put to him, after that event had taken place. Act. i. 6. *Lord wilt thou, at this time, reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael?** It is true indeed, that our Lord directed the attention of his Diſciples to a future ſtate, in which *every man ſhould receive according to his works*,

* It ſhould be obſerved, that the Diſciples, by *reſtoring the kingdom to Iſrael*, undoubtedly meant, *the Meſſiah's* exerciſing kingly power and authority, and, particularly, his reſcuing the Jewiſh nation from that ſervitude to the Romans, which they had long, with the greateſt impatience, ſubmitted to!

as

as a moſt powerful and engaging motive for their conducting themſelves in a proper and becoming manner, in the diſcharge of the commiſſion with which he had inveſted them; but there is no evidence hitherto, of his having given the ſlighteſt hint *when* that judgment ſhould take place.* Mr. Kett, therefore, ſhould have made it perfectly clear to his Readers, that the enquiry of the Diſciples related to theſe different events, before he could have been warranted, by the rules of ſound reaſoning, in drawing the concluſion which he does, that " our Lord's " reply evidently refers to theſe events." But, ſo far is Mr. Kett from giving any evidence, that the three events which he mentions were, in their opinion, to happen together, that he only ſays they *poſſibly* expected that would be the caſe, without attempting to account for their having entertained ſuch an opinion.

The evidence of the true meaning of the queſtions of the Diſciples, as ſtated by the

* It is an obſervation of Biſhop Newton, that if we conſult reaſon, if we conſult revelation, about the time when the general judgment ſhall come, neither of them afford us any light: both of them leave us in darkneſs. See his Diſſertation on the General Judgment.

learned Univerſity Preacher, appears, upon the whole, ſo accurate and ſo unexceptionable, that no apology ſeems neceſſary for preſenting it to the Reader, in his own words.

" The Diſciples," ſays he, " aſtoniſhed " and concerned at the denuntiation of " that ſevere ſentence, which involved even " the coſtly and magnificent ſtructure of " the Temple came privately unto Jeſus, " ſaying—*Tell us, when ſhall theſe things be,* " *and what ſhall be the ſign of thy coming, and* " *of the end of the world?* (Matt. xxiv. 3.) " In the parallel place of St. Mark, (xiii. 4.) " the queſtion is put thus—*Tell us, when* " *ſhall theſe things be, and what ſhall be the* " *ſign when all theſe things ſhall be fulfilled?* " And, in the correſpondent paſſage of St. " Luke, (xxi. 7.) the queſtion is ſtill dif- " ferently propoſed. *But when ſhall theſe* " *things be, and what ſign will there be when* " *theſe things ſhall come to paſs?* By com- " paring St. Luke with St. Matthew, we " diſcover that the two queſtions of the " latter relate entirely to one ſubject; the " firſt to the time when the vengeance was " to be inflicted—the ſecond to the ſigns " which were to precede its execution.

" If

" If again we compare St. Luke with St. " Mark, we perceive that the diſtinction " which a late Writer would introduce be- " tween *theſe things*, and *all theſe things*, is " utterly without foundation. (See Theolog. " Repoſit. vol. vi. p. 188.)"*

Now, in anſwer to theſe queſtions—What was the firſt object which our Lord had in view? Why, plainly that which had ſo remarkably diſtinguiſhed his converſation with them, upon former occaſions, when he told them of the difficulties and hardſhips which they would have to encounter in executing the commiſſion with which he had inveſted them, *to preach the good news of the kingdom of heaven*, or of *the coming of the Meſſiah*, and afterwards, when he foretold his own ſufferings and death! Deeply ſenſible of the effect which ſo terrible a denuntiation upon every thing which, *as Jews*, they held moſt dear upon earth, and thoroughly ſatisfied, from the very nature of the queſtions which they put to him, what lay neareſt their hearts, namely, their expectations of *his coming* as *the Meſſiah*, and their extreme anxiety to have this prediction reconciled with thoſe expectations—his firſt care was,

* See Edwards's Sermon, p. 20-1.

to

to guard them againſt withdrawing their confidence from him, as *their Meſſiah*, and looking out for others, who might lay claim to that character. v. 4. 5. *And Jeſus anſwered and ſaid to them—Take heed leſt any man deceive you; for many ſhall come in my name, ſaying, I am the Chriſt*, or, *the Meſſiah, and ſhall deceive many*. Nay, ſo ſtrongly was he impreſſed with the urgent neceſſity of this caution, that having told them in the twenty-firſt verſe, that the afflictions of thoſe times would be ſuch, as were not from the beginning of the world to that time; that he finds himſelf unable to proceed, without again renewing his caution to them, with the greateſt earneſtneſs! v. 23. 24. *Then, if any man ſhall ſay unto you, Lo here is Chriſt*, or *the Meſſiah, or there—believe him not; for there ſhall ariſe falſe Chriſts*, falſe Meſſiahs, *and falſe Prophets, and ſhall ſhew great ſigns and wonders, inſomuch that, if it were poſſible, they ſhall deceive the very elect*. And that this caution might make the deepeſt impreſſion upon their minds, he adds, v. 25. *Behold I have told you before! Wherefore*, ſays Jeſus, v. 26. *If they ſhall ſay unto you—Behold he is in the deſert, go not forth—behold he is in the ſecret chambers, believe*

believe them not. St. Mark ſays, v. 5, 6. *And Jeſus anſwering them began to ſay—Take heed leſt any man deceive you; for many ſhall come in my name, ſaying, I am Chriſt, and ſhall deceive many.* And having deſcribed to them the exceeding greatneſs of the calamities which were coming upon their nation, he, in like manner with St. Matthew, repeats the caution. v. 21, 22, 23. *Then if any man ſhall ſay to you, Lo here is Chriſt, or lo he is there, believe him not; for falſe Chriſts and falſe Prophets ſhall riſe, and ſhall ſhew * ſigns and wonders, to ſeduce, if it were poſſible, even the elect. But take ye heed: behold I have foretold you all things.* St. Luke, in his account, does not repeat the caution; but it ſtands the foremoſt in our Lord's anſwer to the queſtions of the Diſciples. ch. xxi. 8. And he ſaid—*Take heed that ye be not deceived; for many ſhall come in my name, ſaying, I am Chriſt, and the time draweth near,* when his coming will be fully manifeſted—*go ye not therefore after them.*

* The Greek word which is here tranſlated, *to ſhew*, ſignifies, *to give*, *i. e.* ſays Dr. Farmer—they will appeal to, promiſe, or undertake to produce, ſuch ſigns, uſing the very language of the Jewiſh legiſlator, who repreſents a prophet as giving, *i. e.* propoſing and appealing to a ſign or wonder, whether it did, or did not come to paſs. See Farmer on Miracles, p. 304.

Theſe

Theſe cautions, ſo harmoniouſly related, by all the three Evangeliſts, as occupying the firſt thoughts of our Lord, in his reply to the queſtions of the Diſciples, afford a demonſtrable proof that they did not, at this time, conſider that he had given ſuch full proofs of his being *the Meſſiah*, as they expected; for, if he had, it would have been, not only unneceſſary, but abſurd, to have cautioned them, in ſo particular a manner, againſt *falſe Chriſts* and *falſe Prophets*, who might aſſume that character! But theſe cautions of our Lord, not only ſhew a peculiar and marked attention, highly honorable to his character, to the difficulties of their ſituation, ariſing from their prejudices concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, and the abſolute neceſſity of his affording them ſuch aſſurances of his being *the Meſſiah*, as might, notwithſtanding the calamitous events which he had predicted, keep up their expectations of *his coming* in that character; for the words juſt cited, it muſt be particularly obſerved, not only contain *a caution* againſt their being drawn away by the arts of deceivers, but a plain avowal, likewiſe, that he himſelf ſuſtained the character of *their Meſſiah!* v. 5. *Many*

ſhall

ſhall come in my name, i. e. moſt evidently, in the name of *the Meſſiah*—the character which I claim, *and ſhall deceive many*. When, therefore, the Diſciples aſk Jeſus, *What ſhall be the ſign of thy coming*, it is evident to a demonſtration, that they mean, not *a ſecond*, but his *firſt coming*, as *the Meſſiah*, and that they can mean nothing elſe! To ſay a ſingle word more to prove this, farther than to repeat that this reaſoning does not depend upon any preference which may be given of one Evangeliſt to another, would be to offer an inſult to the Reader's underſtanding; for, in this reſpect, they all ſpeak preciſely the ſame language!

Whatever difficulty there may be, in aſcertaining with preciſion the meaning of the other branch of the queſtion, namely, what ſhall be the ſign of *the end of the world*, or as ſome have ſuppoſed the words ſhould have been tranſlated—*the end of the age*, it muſt be particularly obſerved, that though neither Mark nor Luke have any ſuch queſtion; yet in anſwer to the queſtions of the Diſciples, as ſtated by the Evangeliſts, both of them in common with St. Matthew, ſpeak of *the coming of the end*, and nearly in the ſame words. *Ye ſhall*, ſays St. Mat-

Matthew, v. 6. *hear of wars and rumors of wars: ſee that ye be not troubled; for all theſe things muſt come to paſs, but* THE END *is not yet.* So again he ſays, v. 14. *This Goſpel*, or good news, *of the kingdom* of the Meſſiah, *ſhall be preached in all the world, for a witneſs*, or teſtimony, *to all nations*, that the promiſe of the coming of the Meſſiah, in whom all the nations of the earth ſhould be bleſſed, was fulfilled, *and then ſhall* THE END *come.* St. Mark ſays, ch. xiii. 7. *When ye ſhall hear of wars and rumors of wars, be ye not troubled; for ſuch things muſt needs be, but* THE END *ſhall not be yet.* St. Luke likewiſe ſays, ch. xxi. 9. *When ye ſhall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified; for theſe things muſt firſt come to paſs, but* THE END *is not immediately.**

If

* Dr. Prieſtley, in his Faſt Sermon, preached at Hackney, in the year 1794, ſays, that to him it appears not improbable, that ſeveral circumſtances in our Saviour's prophecy concerning the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the deſolation of Judea, relate to this great and more diſtant period, (termed by Mr. Kett, *the ſecond coming* of our Lord;) for, ſays the Dr. it was delivered in anſwer to a queſtion, put to him by the Diſciples, which reſpected both theſe events, on the idea of their being coincident. And to prove this, he quotes St. Luke, whoſe account he thinks the moſt orderly and diſtinct of any, as ſaying—*When ye ſhall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified; for theſe things muſt firſt come to paſs, but the end is not till by and by*; from which, he ſeems to have thought,

If *the end* here mentioned, in all the three Evangeliſts, relates to *the end* of the Jewiſh ſtate and government, or *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, predicted by our Lord; it ſeems to be ſound reaſoning to conclude, that though the Evangeliſt Matthew is ſingular, in the additional branch of the queſtion, *the end of the world*; yet, as the anſwers of all the three Evangeliſts are eſſentially the ſame; that they all relate to one and the ſame ſubject, *i. e.* not to *the end of the world*, in the ſtrict and proper ſenſe of that phraſe, but to *the end* of the Jewiſh government. This ſeems to receive no ſlight confirmation from the connection of *wars and rumors of wars*, with *the end* which they all mention;

thought, that the Evangeliſt ſpoke of a very far diſtant period, viz. *the ſecond coming* of our Lord. It muſt however be obſerved, that the original conveys no ſuch meaning; but only that it ſhould not be immediately; which was ſtrictly true of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, but ſeems by no means applicable to what was to happen when perhaps thouſands of years ſhould have lapſed; eſpecially as our Lord ſays *poſitively* that that *generation ſhould not paſs till all were fulfilled*.

It ſeems to be particularly unfortunate for Dr. Prieſtley's argument, that he ſhould have given the preference to St. Luke's account, in this inſtance; for he moſt decidedly confines the Diſciples queſtions to one ſingle ſubject, namely, to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. *When ſhall theſe things be, and what ſign will there be, when theſe things ſhall come to paſs?*

which

which is allowed on all hands to relate to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. Beſides—What has *the abomination of deſolation*, mentioned in the fourteenth verſe, to do with *the end of the world*, if by that expreſſion is meant the final conſummation of all things? Or to what purpoſe ſhould the Diſciples be directed, upon ſuch an occaſion, to *flee to the mountains*, and to make ſuch ſpeed as not to enter into an houſe, to take any thing out of it; or to return from the field to ſecure even their neceſſary clothing?

Biſhop Pearce, who tranſlates this branch of the queſtion, not by the phraſe *the end of the world*, but by *the end of the age*, has endeavoured to ſhow, that it ſignifies *the end of the age*, during which, the Jewiſh church and ſtate were to laſt. To confirm the juſtneſs of this tranſlation, and the diſtinction that was made between *the Moſaic age* and *the age of the Meſſiah*, he has produced two paſſages from the Epiſtles, which are here ſubmitted to the Reader's conſideration, together with ſuch remarks upon them as appear ſtrongly to corroborate this meaning. The firſt is, 1 Cor. x. 11. *All theſe things* (the things of which the Apoſtle had before been ſpeaking) *happened to them for exam-*

examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ENDS OF THE WORLD *are come.* The Biſhop's note upon this paſſage is as follows. " St. Paul," ſays he, " did " not imagine that *the end of the world* was " *at hand*, as ſome Commentators have, " much to his prejudice, ſuppoſed; he only " alluded to the Jewiſh diſtinction of time." The other paſſage is in the Epiſtle to the Hebrews, ch. ix. 26. *Now once, in the* END OF THE WORLD, *hath he*, the Meſſiah, *appeared to put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf*; " which " phraſe," ſays the Biſhop, " relates, not *to* " *the end of the world*, but to the preceding " age's being ended." See Biſhop Pearce in loc.

It has been ſuggeſted, by an eminent critic, who however has not authorized the mentioning of his name, that theſe paſſages are equally doubtful, as to their true meaning, as that which they are intended to ſupport, and that therefore they cannot ſatisfactorily eſtabliſh the meaning here contended for. With all due ſubmiſſion, however, it muſt be obſerved, that the current of the argument of the Writer to the Hebrews, in the latter of theſe paſſages, appears to be ſtrongly in favour of this ſenſe; for his

principal object moſt evidently was, to contraſt the Moſaic and the Chriſtian diſpenſations againſt each other, with a view to draw a concluſion to the advantage of the latter, both in point of *excellence* and *duration*. Of the ſuperior excellence of the Chriſtian diſpenſation, in the eſtimation of the Author of this Epiſtle, ſome judgment may be formed, from the magnificent deſcription which he gives of the founder of it; in which he ſeems to labor for expreſſions ſufficiently ſtrong to expreſs his high ſenſe of its value. ch. i. 1-5. *God, who at ſundry times, and in divers manners, ſpake unto the fathers, by the prophets, hath in theſe laſt days** *ſpoken to us by his ſon, whom he hath appointed* κληρονομον παντων *heir of all, i. e.* of all former diſpenſations, *by* or for *whom he made* τους αιωνας *the worlds*, or ages; *who being the brightneſs*

* *The laſt days*, the *laſt times*, and *the latter times*, are phraſes which are generally, if not always, uſed in the Epiſtles, to denote the concluding period of the Jewiſh œconomy: and it is a remark of Dr. Benſon upon 1 John, ii. 18. that if the Apoſtle had ſaid "that the *laſt day* or *hour* "of the world was then juſt at hand, he had ſaid what was "not true. We know that almoſt 1700 years have run out "ſince, and that *the laſt hour* of the world is not yet come." See Benſon in loc.

Mr. Peirce of Exon, on this paſſage, Heb. i. 1. ſays, "This, or the like phraſe, is often met with in the Old "Teſta-

neſs of his glory and the expreſs image of his perſon, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himſelf purged our ſins, ſat down on the right hand of the Majeſty on high; being made ſo much better than the angels, as he hath, by inheritance, i. e. being heir of all, *obtained a more excellent name than they.*

With reſpect to the duration of the Chriſtian diſpenſation; the ſame Writer having quoted a prophecy from the Old Teſtament, of a *new covenant* which was afterwards to be eſtabliſhed, meaning thereby the *Chriſtian covenant*, draws this concluſion from the abrogation of the former, ch. viii. 17. *In that he ſaith a* NEW COVENANT, *he hath made the firſt old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old, is ready to vaniſh away*; plainly intimating by this reaſoning, that the *new covenant* was not ſoon to vaniſh away. And this is perfectly in harmony with the

" Teſtament, to many of which he particularly refers. " And," he adds, " the like we find in the New Teſtament " alſo. Acts ii. 17. 1 Tim. iv. 1. 2 Tim. iii. 1. 1 Pet. i. 20. " 2 Pet. iii. 3. Theſe *laſt days* were underſtood by the *Jews* " to ſignify the days of the King Meſſiah. And that this " is the meaning of ſuch phraſes, may eaſily appear to ſuch " as will conſult the learned Mr. Joſeph Mede upon this " argument, in his *Apoſtacy of the latter times.* ch. xi. xii. " &c." See Peirce in loc.

language of antient prophecy, which conſtantly deſcribes, either in expreſs words, or in words to that effect, *the kingdom of the Meſſiah* as *an everlaſting kingdom*, and as that which ſhould not be deſtroyed; but would be productive of the happieſt effects upon the moral and religious condition of mankind. How then, may it not with propriety be aſked, could the Jewiſh Chriſtian, who cannot be ſuppoſed to have been ignorant of the prophecies of the Old Teſtament, have entertained an idea that *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, the *ſecond coming* of our Lord, and *the end of the world*, were to happen together?* When the known and acknowledged ſentiments of the Diſciples of Jeſus, at this period particularly, are conſidered, the ſuppoſition is, in every view, moſt prepoſterous and abſurd, and too injurious

* Mr. Edward King, in his Morſels of Criticiſm, pp. 251-2. ſays—"Nothing can be more manifeſt, than that the Diſciples *here* did in reality (whatever their intention was) aſk *three* diſtinct queſtions; although it ſeems probable that (as in other inſtances they had not at firſt a full and right apprehenſion of things, ſo in this inſtance alſo) they might confound the *three* ideas together, and at the ſame time mean to aſk only *one queſtion*."

Mr. King's ideas upon the ſubject of this prophecy will be more fully noticed hereafter; but it is difficul to refrain from remarking here upon the impropriety of his aſſertion, that

jurious to his character to be admitted, without the fulleſt and moſt deciſive proof.

It muſt be farther obſerved, that if this paſſage in the Epiſtle to the Hebrews be examined with attention, it will of itſelf furniſh no ſlight proof that *the end of the world*, or *age*, can relate only to the *firſt coming* of *the Meſſiah*; for the appearance of Jeſus *to put away ſin, by the ſacrifice of himſelf*, is clearly diſtinguiſhed from the *ſecond coming*, which the Author of the Epiſtle directed thoſe to whom he wrote, to look for—when *his coming* ſhould be *without ſin unto ſalvation*, and can only mean his *firſt coming* under the character of *the Meſſiah*; for it was *then* only that *he appeared to put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf*. This ſacrifice, the Writer to the Hebrews ſays, was not like the ſacrifices, which were offered under the law, to be repeated *frequently:*

that it is manifeſt the Diſciples did in reality aſk *three* queſtions, though he thinks it probable they meant to aſk only *one*. His reaſon for it ſeems as improper as his aſſertion; for though it is true the Diſciples had not, at firſt, a right apprehenſion of things, yet it ſeems to be unreaſonable to aſcribe to them a meaning different from that apprehenſion, whether *right* or *wrong*. Now their apprehenſions did not, at this time at leaſt, extend beyond his *firſt coming*, and to *that coming* alone, there is the greateſt probability, previous to enquiry, they did confine their queſtion!

it was ſufficient that it was made *once*.— *Now* ONCE *in the end of the world hath he,* THE MESSIAH, *appeared to put away ſin, by the ſacrifice of himſelf. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Chriſt was once offered to bear the ſins of many, and unto them that look for him ſhall he appear,* THE SECOND TIME, *without ſin unto ſalvation.*

In the other paſſage, 1 Cor. x. 11. to which the learned Biſhop refers, the Apoſtle aſſerts that the *Moſaic diſpenſation* had a manifeſt reference to *the Chriſtian*, v. 1. *All our fathers*, ſays he, *were under a cloud, and all paſſed through the ſea, and were all baptized unto Moſes, in the cloud and in the ſea. And aid all eat the ſame ſpiritual meat, and did all drink the ſame ſpiritual drink; for they drank of that ſpiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Chriſt. But*, ſays the Apoſtle, *with many of them God was not well pleaſed, for they were overthrown*, for their diſobedience, *in the wilderneſs. Now*, ſays the Apoſtle, *theſe things were our examples, i. e.* examples or beacons to the Corinthian Chriſtians, *to the intent that we ſhould not luſt after evil things, as they alſo luſted.* In the eighth and following verſes, the Apoſtle enume-

enumerates ſeveral inſtances of their diſobedience, and then again repeats what he had ſaid in the ſixth verſe, v. 11. *Now all theſe things happened unto them for examples*; adding—*they are written for our admonition, upon whom* THE ENDS OF THE WORLD ARE COME. If the Jews, under the *Moſaic diſpenſation*, did not eſcape the puniſhment due to their diſobedience—ſtill leſs could they who were under a more *perfect one*, expect to eſcape. *Wherefore*, ſays the Apoſtle, *let him that thinketh he ſtandeth, take heed leſt he fall.*

If there is good ground, from what has been ſaid, for believing that *the end of the world*,* or *age*, means *the end* of the Jewiſh diſpenſation, " we may reaſonably expect,"

* When Jeſus took his final leave of the Temple, four days before his Crucifixion, ſays the Biſhop of Waterford, his Diſciples obſerved to him the beauty and magnitude of the ſtones with which it was built, and the magnificence of the donations with which it was enriched. Upon this our Lord replied, *See ye not all theſe things?* There ſhall not be left here one ſtone upon another that ſhall not be thrown down. And the ſame day, as he ſat on the Mount of Olives, which commanded a full view of the Temple, and of the whole city, a circumſtance which added energy to a diſcourſe, in which their deſolation was deſcribed and deplored, four of his Apoſtles, Peter, James, John, and Andrew, ſaid to him apart, *Maſter, tell us when theſe things will be, and what is the ſign of thy coming* (to effect this deſtruction), *and of the concluſion of the* (Moſaic) *age.*

to uſe the words of the learned Univerſity Preacher, " that as the information ſolicited " is confined to one event, the information " communicated will be equally reſtricted. " This preſumption," he adds, " will be " confirmed by a peruſal of the chapter we " are at preſent conſidering; in which, " from the third to the twenty-ninth verſe, " our Saviour replies to the ſecond queſtion, " by pointing out the ſigns which would " enable the Diſciples to prognoſticate his " coming: he proceeds from the twenty- " eighth verſe to anſwer the firſt queſtion, " by defining the limits within which both " the deſolation and his own glorious ad- " vent would certainly happen; and de- " claring, in the moſt ſolemn language, " that they ſhould come to paſs in that " generation: but as the preciſe time of " their accompliſhment was known only to " the Father, he concludes the chapter by " delivering an exhortation to ſobriety and " vigilance." See Dr. Edwards's Sermon, p. 22.*

From

* The Author of the Purſuits of Literature has beſtowed the higheſt encomiums upon Mr. Edward King, the learned Author of Morſels of Criticiſm, which it is not the deſign of this note to detract from, ſo far as his piety and good inten-

From this excellent epitome of the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew; it would be natural enough to conclude that the whole of it, in his opinion, related to the

intentions are concerned; for which the fulleſt credit will readily be given him. But as his learned Encomiaſt ſays he "never obſerved more caution and more warineſs than in "this writer," it will be neceſſary to attend particularly to what he has ſaid upon the ſubject of this prophecy of our Lord. He firſt ſtates that there has been "an inconceivable "prejudice of applying the whole prophecy merely to the "deſtruction of Jeruſalem; (to which it can only relate *in* "*part*;) and as ſtrong a prejudice on the other hand, of "always conceiving the ſecond coming of our Lord, and "the end of the world, and the final deſtruction of the "earth, as being all one and the ſame event." This obſervation of Mr. King, ſo far as it concerns *the ſecond coming of our Lord*, and *the final deſtruction of the earth*, in no reſpect, will apply to the object of this work, and whether the application of the prophecy, excluſively, *to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem* be *a prejudice*, can only be known by a cloſe inveſtigation of the ſubject of this prophecy: but the note in page 148, will very ſufficiently evince that Mr. King begins his examination with but little appearance of caution and warineſs!

As little caution and warineſs is there in Mr. King's aſſertion, that "our Lord ſeparates the *ſeveral events*, and, "in reality, gives *three* diſtinct anſwers: the want of at-"tending to which circumſtance, has ſlung confuſion upon "the whole ſubject."

Mr. King's method of removing this confuſion is as follows:—

"Firſt," ſays he, "we find our Lord, gives a *general* "anſwer, which applies equally to all three events."

"Then, He gives a particular anſwer to the *firſt* queſtion."

"Then, as particular an anſwer to the ſecond."

"And laſtly, as particular an anſwer to the third."

"And

the advent of Jeſus, as *the Meſſiah*; of which it cannot be denied, without denying the whole tenor of the Goſpel Hiſtory, they were in conſtant and earneſt expectation. Yet, according to him, this advent is not

" And after that, He aſſumes the general conſideration " of the *ſudden* manner in which every one of theſe three " tremendous events were to come to paſs, and concludes " with admonitions." page 252.

Our Lord's " general anſwer, which," Mr. King ſays, " applies equally to all three, in one ſenſe or another," extends from the third to the fifteenth verſe, concerning which aſſertion, the Reader muſt judge for himſelf; for there ſeems to be no neceſſity for ſaying a ſingle word to diſprove ſo glaring a miſrepreſentation! The firſt queſtion concerning the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, Mr. King ſays, extends from the fourteenth verſe to the twenty-third. " Having finiſhed this particular anſwer to the firſt part of " the queſtion concerning the deſtruction of Jeruſalem," " Mr. K. ſays, " our Lord then reſumes the ſubject by the " word of reference, Τοτε: and goes on to deſcribe the ſigns " of his *ſecond coming*; informing us, that, even after the de- " ſtruction of Jeruſalem, there ſhould again be falſe Chriſts, " (that is, *perſons* pretending that the Meſſiah, the appointed " Ruler, was come, and aſſuming that character) in the " ſame manner as we know there really had been Impoſtors " of that kind, juſt before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem."

This ſecond coming, Mr. King thinks, is deſcribed from the twenty-ſecond verſe to the thirty-ſixth; which verſe, he ſays, " muſt ſurely refer to the end of the world; or the " end and perfecting of the day of judgment; or the total " deſtruction of the preſent ſcene of things upon earth."

The Reader will, it is hoped, be able to form ſome judgment how far Mr. King has ſucceeded in his enquiry, by attending to the examination of this ſubject, and to ſuch remarks as may occaſionally be made upon Mr. King's hypotheſis.

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the advent of *the Meſſiah*, but of " *the Son* " *of Man* deſcending *viſibly* from heaven, " before the generation then exiſting was " totally extinguiſhed;" and from hence he haſtily concludes, that " this awful appear- " ance is not recorded in hiſtory, amongſt " the ſtupendous prodigies of the Jewiſh " war." But, before a concluſion ſhould have been drawn by the learned Univerſity Preacher, ſo injurious to Chriſtianity, it ſhould have been ſhewn, with ſome degree of evidence, that *the coming* mentioned by the Diſciples, was ſuch as he has aſſerted it to be, and that it cannot poſſibly admit of any other ſenſe; for there ſeems to be no reaſon why the advocates of Chriſtianity, who are called upon to defend it againſt objections, ſhould acquieſce in aſſertions without proof! Now this is a queſtion of fact! Did the Diſciples of Jeſus, at the time when they put theſe queſtions to him, believe that *the Meſſiah was come*—or did they not? If they did, the learned Univerſity Preacher was certainly juſtified in affixing another meaning to their queſtion concerning *his coming*; and provided he produced ſufficient proofs, from the Hiſtory of the Evangeliſts, to ſupport that meaning, he

he had an undoubted right to draw ſuch inferences from it as the truth of things required! Fortunately, however, for Chriſtianity, the evidence that *the Meſſiah* was not, in the eſtimation of the Diſciples of Jeſus, *yet come*, in the ſenſe in which they expected him *to come*, is as complete as can be wiſhed! No man, it may be aſſerted, without fear of contradiction, can read the Goſpel Hiſtory with attention, without being fully convinced that, at the time when they put theſe queſtions, they continued to expect *his coming*—not in the character of *the Judge of the world*, but in that of *the Meſſiah*. Of this there is the moſt direct and unequivocal proof, in the reply of Jeſus, which is immediately connected with the queſtions of the Diſciples; for as hath already been obſerved, what could have induced him, ſo earneſtly and ſo repeatedly, to caution them againſt *falſe Chriſts*, but a firm perſuaſion that they ſuppoſed *the coming of the true Meſſiah* was not, in the ſenſe in which they expected him, yet realized? And, if not, they were particularly juſtified in aſking the queſtions which they did, when they were told of events which contradicted all their ideas of *the nature of*

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the Meſſiah's character. Nay, it may be aſſerted that, if they had not aſked theſe queſtions, one important internal evidence that the Hiſtory is genuine, would have been wanting; for it was impoſſible for them not to have been extremely ſolicitous to obtain ſome information concerning it, or to have reſted ſatisfied till they had obtained it! If then the *firſt coming* of Jeſus as *the Meſſiah*, is a natural and probable ſolution of the meaning of *the coming* mentioned in the queſtions of the Diſciples, why ſeek for any other? Or for a meaning which is juſtified by no one circumſtance, either in the characters and ſentiments of thoſe who put them, at that period at leaſt —or, as will hereafter appear, in the reply of our Lord to thoſe queſtions, but which, on the contrary, is contradicted, in the ſtrongeſt manner, by them all?

Our Lord having, as has already been obſerved, in the fourth and fifth verſes, in a very particular and impreſſive manner, guarded his Diſciples againſt the arts of deceivers, who might aſſume the character of *the Meſſiah*,* he immediately connects with this

* Mr. Edward King, in his Morſels of Criticiſm, p. 287. ſays, "that the immediate ſigns of our Lord's *ſecond coming* "to

this caution, the particular ſigns by which they might be fully aſſured of *his coming*. v. 6, 7, 8. *Ye ſhall hear of wars and rumors of wars, ſee that ye be not troubled; for all theſe things muſt come to paſs, but the end is not yet; for nation ſhall riſe againſt nation, and kingdom againſt kingdom, and there ſhall be famines, and peſtilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All theſe are the beginning of ſorrows*; *i. e.* of the troubles which were to befal their country, in thoſe calamitous times.* In the ninth and following verſes, our Lord proceeds to inform them of the perſonal troubles to which they would

" *to reſtore all things*, are declared to be the appearance of " *falſe Prophets* and *falſe Chriſts (or pretended Rulers and* " *Deliverers.)*" But if Mr. K. refers to this paſſage of St. Matthew, for proof of this, there ſeems to be no ground whatever for ſuch an application! Again he ſays, p. 258. that our Lord informs us " that even after the deſtruction " of Jeruſalem, there ſhould again be falſe Chriſts, (that is, " *perſons pretending that the Meſſiah, the appointed Ruler, was* " *come, and aſſuming that character)* in the ſame manner as " we know there really had been impoſtors of that kind juſt " before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. Such, he tells us " poſitively, there ſhall be again, before his ſecond coming. " And there ſhall be, moreover, ſome particular *great* " *diſturbance, and general affliction* in the world, juſt at that " time."

* For the fulfilment of theſe predictions ſee Jortin's Remarks, vol. i. p. 21. Lardner's Antient Jewiſh and Heathen Teſt. vol. i. p 47, &c. and Biſhop Newcome's Obſervations, p. 187, &c.

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themſelves be expoſed, and of the infidelity, or falling away of ſome, ariſing from the arts of deceivers, and from the peculiar hardſhips and difficulties of the times. But, to encourage them to perſeverance, and to facilitate their eſcape, of which he gives them the ſtrongeſt aſſurances, he points out to them ſome farther ſigns of the approaching completion of his prediction. v 9 to the 14th. *Then ſhall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and ſhall kill* ſome of *you, and ye ſhall be hated by all nations for my name's ſake, i. e.* for adherence to me as *the Meſſiah. And then ſhall many be offended, and ſhall betray one another, and ſhall hate one another, and many falſe Prophets ſhall riſe, and ſhall deceive many. And becauſe iniquity ſhall abound, the love of many ſhall wax cold. But he that ſhall endure to the end*—whoſoever ſhall continue faithful to me, in the midſt of ſuch terrible calamities, as the perſon whom they believe to be *the Meſſiah—the ſame ſhall be ſaved.* He ſhall be thoroughly ſatisfied, from the awful deſolations which are coming upon the Jewiſh nation, that *the Meſſiah's kingdom* is of a very different nature from what he apprehended, and, by taking the warning which I have given him, ſhall be ſaved

from

this caution, the particular ſigns by which they might be fully aſſured of *his coming*. v. 6, 7, 8. *Ye ſhall hear of wars and rumors of wars, ſee that ye be not troubled; for all theſe things muſt come to paſs, but the end is not yet; for nation ſhall riſe againſt nation, and kingdom againſt kingdom, and there ſhall be famines, and peſtilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All theſe are the beginning of ſorrows*; *i. e.* of the troubles which were to befal their country, in thoſe calamitous times.* In the ninth and following verſes, our Lord proceeds to inform them of the perſonal troubles to which they would

" *to reſtore all things*, are declared to be the appearance of " *falſe Prophets* and *falſe Chriſts (or pretended Rulers and* " *Deliverers.)*" But if Mr. K. refers to this paſſage of St. Matthew, for proof of this, there ſeems to be no ground whatever for ſuch an application! Again he ſays, p. 258. that our Lord informs us " that even after the deſtruction " of Jeruſalem, there ſhould again be falſe Chriſts, (that is, " *perſons pretending that the Meſſiah, the appointed Ruler, was* " *come, and aſſuming that character)* in the ſame manner as " we know there really had been impoſtors of that kind juſt " before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. Such, he tells us " poſitively, there ſhall be again, before his ſecond coming. " And there ſhall be, moreover, ſome particular *great* " *diſturbance, and general affliction* in the world, juſt at that " time."

* For the fulfilment of theſe predictions ſee Jortin's Remarks, vol. i. p. 21. Lardner's Antient Jewiſh and Heathen Teſt. vol. i. p 47, &c. and Biſhop Newcome's Obſervations, p. 187, &c.

them-

themſelves be expoſed, and of the infidelity, or falling away of ſome, ariſing from the arts of deceivers, and from the peculiar hardſhips and difficulties of the times. But, to encourage them to perſeverance, and to facilitate their eſcape, of which he gives them the ſtrongeſt aſſurances, he points out to them ſome farther ſigns of the approaching completion of his prediction. v 9 to the 14th. *Then ſhall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and ſhall kill* ſome of *you, and ye ſhall be hated by all nations for my name's ſake, i. e.* for adherence to me as *the Meſſiah. And then ſhall many be offended, and ſhall betray one another, and ſhall hate one another, and many falſe Prophets ſhall riſe, and ſhall deceive many. And becauſe iniquity ſhall abound, the love of many ſhall wax cold. But he that ſhall endure to the end*—whoſoever ſhall continue faithful to me, in the midſt of ſuch terrible calamities, as the perſon whom they believe to be *the Meſſiah—the ſame ſhall be ſaved.* He ſhall be thoroughly ſatisfied, from the awful deſolations which are coming upon the Jewiſh nation, that *the Meſſiah's kingdom* is of a very different nature from what he apprehended, and, by taking the warning which I have given him, ſhall be ſaved from

from the calamities in which others will be overwhelmed.

It has again and again been obſerved, that our Lord, with the moſt diſtinguiſhed tenderneſs and humanity, ſympathized with his Diſciples, in the diſtreſſes which he knew ſuch ungrateful tidings, as he had from time to time to communicate to them, could not fail to produce upon their minds, and that therefore he offered them ſuch conſolations as had a tendency to keep them from deſpondence, under the exigencies of the moment. But, it will readily be admitted by the attentive Reader, that, in no caſe, was this more neceſſary, than when he deſcribed calamities the moſt awful that the mind of man can conceive! He therefore aſſures them, as he had done upon a former occaſion, not only that their perſeverance would ultimately be crowned with ſucceſs—but points out the very time when they might obtain the deliverance which they ſo anxiouſly expected. v. 14. *And this Goſpel*, this good news, *of the kingdom, i. e.* of *the kingdom of the Meſſiah, ſhall be preached throughout the whole world*—or, as it is in St. Mark, ch. xiii. 10.—*muſt firſt be publiſhed among all nations—and then ſhall the end come.*

The

The Diſciples of Jeſus, who had themſelves received a commiſſion to announce the approach of *the Meſſiah's kingdom*, could not poſſibly be at any loſs to underſtand what our Lord here meant, by the expreſſion *the Goſpel of the kingdom*; for it was uppermoſt in their thoughts, and anxiouſly expected by them. And what our Lord meant by *the end* here mentioned, muſt be extremely evident from the following verſe, v. 15. *When ye therefore ſhall ſee the abomination of deſolation, ſpoken of by Daniel the Prophet, ſtand in the holy place, whoſo readeth*, or rather perceiveth it, *let him underſtand, i. e.* let him take warning, and follow my directions for his ſecurity, at ſuch an awful criſis! And that this expreſſion, *the abomination of deſolation*, might not be miſunderſtood, it is immediately added, v. 16. *Then*, when this was to happen, *let thoſe who are* IN JUDEA *flee to the mountains—let him who is on the houſe top not come down to take any thing out of his houſe—neither let him who is in the field, return back to take his clothes*; for the danger would be ſo preſſing, as not to admit of the leaſt delay! *And woe to them who are with child, and to them who give ſuck in thoſe days: but pray ye that your flight be*

not in the winter, neither on the ſabbath day; for then ſhall be great tribulation, ſuch as was not ſince the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever ſhall be. And except thoſe days ſhould be ſhortened, there ſhould no fleſh be ſaved: but for the elect's ſake, thoſe days ſhall be ſhortened. St. Luke's account is given with ſo marked a preciſion, that it might have been ſuppoſed impoſſible to have applied it to any other event, than to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, if *preciſion* could have exempted it from an application to a diſtant period. ch. xxi. 20. *When ye ſhall ſee* JERUSALEM *compaſſed with armies, then know that the deſolation thereof is nigh. Then let them who are in* JUDEA *flee to the mountains; and let them who are in the midſt of it depart out; and let not them who are in the countries enter thereinto; for theſe be the* DAYS OF VENGEANCE, *that all things which are written* concerning them, *may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give ſuck* IN THOSE DAYS; *for there ſhall be great diſtreſs* IN THE LAND, *and wrath upon* THIS PEOPLE, *and they ſhall fall by the edge of the ſword, and ſhall be led away captive into all nations, and* JERUSALEM *ſhall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*

But

But notwithſtanding this preciſion, Dr. Prieſtley ſays, " To me it appears not im-
" probable, that ſeveral circumſtances in
" our Saviour's prophecy concerning *the de-*
" *ſtruction of Jeruſalem*, and the deſolation
" of Judea, relate to this great and more
" diſtant period."* viz. to the Millennium, and to the events which are now paſſing in the world, as preparatory to the deſtruction of all the kingdoms of the earth, and the eſtabliſhment of the Meſſiah's kingdom, in its utmoſt ſplendor and glory. Theſe he thinks to be *the days of vengeance* mentioned by St. Luke; for he ſays, " the only days
" of vengeance particularly announced by
" the antient Prophets, to which Jeſus here
" alludes, relate to the judgments of God,
" upon the Gentiles who had ſhewn en-
" mity to the Jews, and eſpecially in their
" oppoſition to their reſettlement in their
" own country."† It would be high preſumption in any one to deny, that the events which are now paſſing in the world, may poſſibly lead to the accompliſhment of the great deſigns of Providence, foretold by the antient Prophets; but to ſay that the only *days of vegeance* mentioned by St. Luke,

* Prieſtley's Faſt Sermon, p. 14. † p. 17.

 relate

relate to the judgments of God upon the Gentiles who had ſhewn enmity to the Jews, is flatly to contradict St. Luke's account; which, on the contrary, certainly relate *to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, if not to that *only!* Beſides, it is notorious that the antient Prophets foretell *days of vengeance*, not upon the Gentiles *only*, but upon *the Jews alſo*; and particularly that very vengeance ſo accurately deſcribed by St. Luke.

St. Luke, it is true, in his deſcription of his country's deſtruction, ſtates that the effects of that awful calamity would be felt by the Jewiſh nation *till the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled*; which event, an experience of a long ſeries of ages has ſhewn to remain, as yet, unaccompliſhed; but this appears to be the only circumſtance in the prophecy which hitherto, at leaſt, relates to *a diſtant period*; or which can be ſo applied, without ſetting at nought all the rules of language; without diſregarding the connection and occaſion of the diſcourſe, and without rendering prophecy as uncertain as thoſe of the antient heathen Oracles.

After our Lord had thus deſcribed the exceeding greatneſs of the calamities which were coming upon the Jewiſh nation, his extreme

extreme ſenſibility to the deep impreſſion which ſuch a deſcription could not fail to make upon the minds of his Diſciples, deeply tinctured as they were with the idea of *the Meſſiah's kingdom* being of a worldly nature, induced him, with the greateſt earneſtneſs, to repeat his caution to them, to beware of deceivers, leaſt, in ſuch circumſtances they ſhould be drawn from their own ſtedfaſtneſs, by the hopes of ſuch a deliverer. v. 23. *Then*,* at ſuch a period of trial and difficulty, *if any man ſhall ſay unto you—Lo, here is Chriſt*, or *the Meſſiah, or there, believe him not*; *for there ſhall ariſe falſe Chriſts and falſe prophets*, who will take advantage of ſuch a general expectation,

* Mr. King ſays, M. C. p. 258. that this is a word of reference, (it muſt be ſuppoſed to what went before) and that then the Evangeliſt goes on to deſcribe the ſigns of his *ſecond coming*, informing us that, even after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, there ſhould again be *falſe Chriſts*, &c. But on what authority does Mr. King ſay this? For this word of reference is uſed in the 9th, the 10th, the 14th, the 16th, the 21ſt, and the 23d verſes—the reference therefore is not to be diſputed; but to *what* is the queſtion? not, as it ſhould ſeem, to a *ſecond coming*, of which, even according to Mr. K.'s own account, they had no idea; but to his *firſt coming*, on which all their thoughts were wholly engaged; and theſe ſeveral notes of reference in our Lord's anſwer, as if by deſign to prevent miſtakes, evidently ſhow to what they belong. But what is particularly remarkable, this ſame word of reference is continued in the 30th verſe!

and ſhall propheſy ſmooth things, and ſuch as are more adapted to the general wiſh, *and ſhall ſhew great ſigns and wonders, inſomuch that, if it were poſſible, they ſhall deceive the very elect.* But our Lord does not ſtop here! To give all poſſible weight to his caution, again and again repeated, he finiſhes it by expreſsly telling them, that he had been thus particular in foretelling all this, that they might be the more upon their guard againſt the artifices of deceivers. v. 25. *Behold I have told you before! Wherefore if they ſhall ſay unto you, Behold he,* the Meſſiah, *is in the deſert, go not forth—behold he is in the ſecret chambers,* waiting for a fit opportunity to reveal himſelf, and to work your deliverance, *believe them not; for as the lightning cometh out of the caſt, and ſhineth even unto the weſt, ſo ſhall alſo the coming of the Son of Man,* for perſpicuity, *be—i. e.* all will ſee, and be compelled to acknowledge, from the moſt melancholy and fatal experience, that far from being raiſed, as they expect, to great power and worldly ſplendor, by *the coming of the Meſſiah,* they ſhall be humbled to the very duſt, and become a proverb and a bye-word among the nations. *Jeruſalem ſhall be trodden down by the Gentiles till the*

times

times of the Gentiles be fulfilled; for whereſoever the carcaſe is, there will the eagles, the deſtroying armies whoſe ſtandard is the eagle, *be gathered together,* to compaſs them round, and to lay them even with the ground, and their children within them. See Mark xiii. 21. 22. 23.

The extent of the deſolation mentioned in the preceding part of the chapter; the Evangeliſt goes on to deſcribe, in figurative but ſtrong language, in the twenty-ninth verſe. *Immediately after,* or as the prepoſition tranſlated *after* ſhould have been rendered * amidſt, or during, *the tribulation of thoſe days ſhall the ſun be darkened, and the moon ſhall not give her light, and the ſtars ſhall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven ſhall be ſhaken: And then ſhall appear the ſign of the Son of Man in heaven.* The language of St. Luke, in the parallel chapter, it muſt be obſerved, is leſs figurative, and

* Mr. Edward King has thus tranſlated this prepoſition. Immediately, amidſt the affliction of thoſe days, &c. And he ſays—H. Stevens informs us, that the prepoſition here with an accuſative ſignifies inter or propter. He adds—I find no authority in his Theſaurus for tranſlating it, in this inſtance, poſt after. Neither does it appear, from what Vigerus ſays, p. 620, that ſuch a mode of tranſlation is to be preferred, even if it might be allowed. Morſels of Criticiſm, p. 261.

may, of itſelf, very properly be conſidered as a good interpretation of the more ſplendid deſcription of St. Matthew. ch. xxi. 25, 26, 27. *And there ſhall be ſigns in the ſun, and in the moon, and in the ſtars; and upon the earth diſtreſs of nations with perplexity; the ſea and the waves thereof roaring; mens hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after thoſe things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of the heaven ſhall be ſhaken, and then ſhall they ſee the Son of Man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.*

It ſeems to be deſerving of particular notice, that St. Luke's language, beſides its being leſs figurative, and, upon that account, certainly, more eaſily applicable to temporal calamities,* is, in the

* Dr. Townſon, having quoted v. 29, ſays,—"This is the ſymbolical language of prophecy, to ſignify the ruin of great perſonages and kingdoms, and denotes the ſame events which are thus predicted in St. Luke xxi. 23. 24. There ſhall be great diſtreſs in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they ſhall fall by the edge of the ſword, and ſhall be led away captive into all nations; and Jeruſalem ſhall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." The Dr. adds—"It is probable that our Lord, as was ſometimes done by the Prophets, having firſt delivered theſe things in figurative diction, did then open the meaning of the prophecy in private. St. Luke hath recorded the explanatory part, St. Matthew only the figurative."

cloſeſt

cloſeſt manner, connected with his preceding deſcription, and cannot, in fact, be referred to any other event, than *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, without violating all the rules of good writing, and rendering the account of the Evangeliſt abſolutely unintelligible! *There ſhall*, ſays St. Luke, v. 23. *be great diſtreſs in the land, and wrath upon* THIS PEOPLE, *i. e.* upon the Jews, *and they ſhall fall by the edge of the ſword, and ſhall be led away captive into all nations*; *and* JERUSALEM *ſhall be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*; *and there ſhall be ſigns in the ſun, &c.*

But whatever importance there is in theſe obſervations, they will be ſtrongly corroborated, by the conſideration that our Lord here uſes a language to deſcribe the effects of the calamities which were approaching, in terms which, as Jews, could not but be familiar to the Diſciples, and indeed to every Jew who paid any attention to the prophetic writings; for it was in terms ſimilar to thoſe of St. Matthew, that the antient Prophets of their nation deſcribed the effects of the calamities which, at different periods, were inflicted upon the nations of the earth, whether they related

to

to Jews or Gentiles. This will be abundantly evident from the following paſſages, taken from the prophetic writings of the Old Teſtament; which are, beyond all doubt, deſcriptive of temporal calamities, and of temporal calamities only.

The Prophet Iſaiah, ſpeaking of the deſtruction of Babylon, ſays, ch. xiii. 9. 10. *Behold the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with fierce anger and wrath, to lay the land deſolate; and he ſhall deſtroy the ſinners thereof out of it.* He adds—*The ſtars of heaven, and the conſtellations thereof, ſhall not give their light; the ſun ſhall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon ſhall not cauſe her light to ſhine.*

The ſame Prophet deſcribes the deſtruction which was to come upon Idumea, in language as ſtrong as can well be conceived. ch. xxxiv. 4. *All the hoſt of heaven ſhall be diſſolved, and the heavens ſhall be rolled together as a ſcrole; and all their hoſt ſhall fall down as a leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig-tree.*

The Prophet Ezekiel, announcing, in the name of God, the future ruin of Egypt, ſays, ch. xxxii. 7, 8. *When I ſhall put thee out, I will cover the heaven, and make the ſtars thereof dark. I will cover the ſun*

ſun with a cloud, and the moon ſhall not give her light. All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and ſet darkneſs upon thy land, ſaith the Lord God.

In the Prophet Joel there is a paſſage which is particularly deſerving of the Reader's attention, as it ſeems to be deſcriptive of this very calamity of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, predicted by our Lord. ch. ii. 1, 2, 3, 10 *Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and ſound an alarm in my holy mountain. Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord cometh—for it is nigh at hand; a day of darkneſs and gloomineſs—a day of clouds and thick darkneſs, as the morning ſpread upon the mountains; a great people and a ſtrong—there hath not been ever the like, neither ſhall be any more, for the years of many generations. A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth. The earth ſhall quake before them—the heavens ſhall tremble—the ſun ſhall be dark, and the ſtars ſhall withdraw their ſhining.*

The other phraſe, *the powers of the heavens ſhall be ſhaken*, uſed by all the three Evangeliſts, is in exact conformity to the language of antient prophecy, and to that language too which the Prophet uſes, when deſcribing this

this very calamity of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*. Iſaiah ii. 19. *They ſhall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord and for the glory of his majeſty, when he ariſeth to ſhake terribly the earth.* So again, ch. xiii. 13. *I will ſhake the heavens, and the earth ſhall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of Hoſts, and in the day of his fierce anger.*

From theſe examples, the ſimilarity of the language of the Prophets to that of the Evangeliſts, in deſcribing the calamities which our Lord had declared were coming upon the Jewiſh nation, is extremely evident. And ſhould any one think that he uſed a ſtrength of expreſſion *equal*, if not *ſuperior* to their's; it muſt be obſerved, that it might naturally have been expected his quick ſenſe of the greatneſs of theſe calamities, together with the conſideration of their near approach, would be diſcoverable, in the peculiar ſtrength of his language. It muſt at leaſt appear, in the higheſt degree, ſtrange, that the declaration that all the things which had before been mentioned, were to happen, *in that generation*, ſhould ſtand for nothing, merely becauſe Jeſus adopted a language that was peculiarly ſtrong;

for

for the calamities which were coming upon the Jewiſh nation; the Evangeliſts all concur in aſſerting, were tremendous in the extreme, and ſuch as were never to be exceeded in any future period. Thus Matthew ſays, ch. xxiv. 21. *Then ſhall be great tribulation, ſuch as was not ſince the beginning of the world to this time*; and he adds—*no, nor ever ſhall be.* St. Mark ſays, ch. xiii. 19. *In thoſe days ſhall be affliction, ſuch as was not from the beginning of the creation unto this time, neither ſhall be.* And St. Luke calls thoſe days, *days of vengeance*, and farther ſays, *there ſhall be great diſtreſs in the land, and wrath upon this people.* In ſhort, they all ſeem to labor for ſtrength of expreſſion, ſufficient to deſcribe the calamities of thoſe times. This ſeems not to have been ſufficiently attended to, by the patrons of a double meaning, in theſe chapters; or, it may be preſumed, they would not have found themſelves ſo preſſed, by the ſtrong language of this prediction, as to apply it to other diſtant events, in defiance of the ſubſequent declaration that *all theſe things* were to happen *in that generation.* But of this more hereafter. In ſhort, the language of antient prophecy appears to be the only legitimate commentary upon that

that of our Lord, in the verſe under conſideration, and to ſeek for any other, is only to puzzle and perplex what appears to be perfectly clear and evident! It muſt be added alſo, that the uſe of this language is one, among a multitude of ſtrong internal characters, of the authenticity of the Hiſtory; for nothing could have been more natural than for a Jew to expreſs himſelf, eſpecially upon ſuch a ſubject, in the language of antient prophecy, which muſt have been ſo perfectly familiar to his hearers.*

The

* The Author of the Purſuits of Literature has, by quoting Mr. E. King's interpretation of the twenty-ninth verſe of this chapter, given an importance to it which it does not appear to deſerve, and, as it ſhould ſeem, *merely* becauſe of the dreadful effects of the preſent Revolution in France—as if the deſtruction of any great power, would not be productive of the ſame or ſimilar effects! That theſe effects have been, in general, the natural conſequences of the deſtruction of States and Empires, ſeems plain, from the language of the Prophets, here laid before the Reader; and as the Evangeliſts, one and all, particularly mention *the ſtate* to which theſe calamities refer, it cannot, on this account, be interpreted of any event or events which were to happen thouſands of years afterwards, without ſetting all juſt rules of criticiſm at defiance. What would be thought of a modern writer, who ſhould aſſert that the City of London was to experience a very heavy calamity *in this generation*—that the whole of England ſhould be ſo materially affected by it, as to ſuffer incredible miſeries in conſequence of it; and on being queſtioned, as to his meaning, he ſhould aſſert that he had been deſcribing events which were to happen thou-

The Evangeliſt goes on, in the thirtieth verſe, in the ſame figurative ſtile, and with the ſame alluſion to the language of antient prophecy. *And then, i. e.* when theſe calamities ſhould be inflicted upon the Jewiſh nation, *ſhall appear the ſign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then ſhall all the tribes of the earth*, or rather of the land,* *mourn, and they ſhall ſee the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven*, or, according to St. Luke, *in a cloud, with power and great glory*. The learned Univerſity Preacher ſays, that "the thirtieth "verſe ſeems ſtrongly to oppoſe, if not irre- "fragably to confute, the opinion that the "chapter relates entirely to the deſtruction "of Jeruſalem;"† but perhaps, on due conſideration, this verſe will, on the contrary, be found not to oppoſe, but moſt accurately to confirm and ſtrengthen the unity of ſenſe which is here contended for.

thouſands of years afterwards, notwithſtanding he had before aſſerted that all the things he had ſpoken of, were to happen in that period? Yet juſt the ſame is the ſtatement of the Evangeliſts, according to Mr. King's account! When will men of genius and learning do juſtice to their own underſtandings, and to the ſacred writings? When will they ceaſe to force them to ſpeak a language which was foreign to their thoughts?

* It is a fact perfectly familiar to all who are acquainted with the Hiſtory of the Jews, that they were divided into twelve tribes, and therefore there is a peculiar propriety in the expreſſion, as applied to them.

† Edward's Sermon, p. 24.

It muſt be carefully obſerved, by the judicious and attentive Reader, that *the Son of Man coming*, in this verſe, evidently ſignifies *the coming of the Meſſiah*; for, otherwiſe, our Lord's cautions, ſo repeatedly made, to beware of deceivers who ſhould aſſume that character, muſt have been abſolutely unintelligible to the Diſciples: Nor can it be diſputed, without diſputing the ſtrongeſt hiſtorical evidence, that the Jews believed *their Meſſiah*, whenever he ſhould appear, would be a mighty deliverer, who ſhould conduct them to conqueſt and to empire. This was *the ſign of the Son of Man*, or of *the coming of the Son of Man*, as *the Meſſiah*, which they ſo anxiouſly expected, and, without which, all other proofs of *the Meſſiahſhip* of Jeſus were, in their eſtimation, uſeleſs. But Jeſus, in the verſe under conſideration, tells them that when the calamities deſcribed in the preceding part of the chapter, and particularly in the preceding verſe, ſhould come upon them, they ſhould *then* ſee *the true ſign* of *the Son of Man coming*, not as they expected, as a mighty conqueror—but *in the clouds of heaven*, to execute vengeance upon them.

This language, as has already been hinted, the judicious Reader is requeſted particularly

larly to obſerve, is not our Saviour's—but like that in the preceding verſe, is evidently borrowed from antient prophecy, which, as Jews, was perfectly familiar, not to the Diſciples *only*, but to the whole nation, particularly as they underſtood it, in a ſenſe the moſt favorable to their worldly and ambitious expectations. And our Lord, with ſingular propriety, appears to have uſed the language of the Prophet Daniel upon this occaſion; for it evidently deſcribes the very ſame event, namely, *the coming of the Son of Man*, or of *the Meſſiah*, and was extremely well calculated, when they ſhould ſee the deſtruction of their country, to convince them how much they had miſtaken *the nature* of *the Meſſiah's* character. Dan. vii. 13. *I ſaw*, ſays the Prophet, *in the night, viſions, and behold one like the*, or a *Son of Man*, the very expreſſion ſo conſtantly uſed by our Lord, *came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the antient of days, and they brought him near before him, and there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages, ſhould ſerve him.**

From

* The Jews, ſays Dr. Gerard, miſtook the ſenſe of this prediction: they ſeem to have concluded from it, that the Meſſiah would come down from heaven in viſible glory, in

From this paſſage of the Prophet Daniel, it appears evidently that *the coming of the Son of Man*, or of *the Meſſiah*, which he manifeſtly, in theſe expreſſions, foretells, was to be *in clouds*, or *in the clouds of heaven*. Very pertinent is what the ingenious Dr. Gerard obſerves, upon the uſe of this phraſe —" The Jews," ſays he, " could ſcarcely " fail to perceive, that coming in the clouds " of heaven, implied executing judgment; " for the expreſſion is uſed ſeveral times in " their own ſcriptures, and always means " no more than this; they notwithſtanding " ſtrained it to a literal ſenſe, to the mean- " ing of a viſible appearance in Daniel's " prediction; and though they underſtood " it to imply the execution of judgment, " yet it was only upon their enemies, not " upon themſelves. But Jeſus informed " them that it did not here, any more than " in other paſſages, denote a viſible appear- " ance; that it meant ſimply the execution

the character of a temporal prince, put himſelf at their head, and lead them forth to conquer all their enemies, and to erect an univerſal empire: and whenever they aſked a ſign from Jeſus, their meaning was, that he ſhould appear in this very manner. Indeed they had come to reckon ſuch an appearance ſo proper and determinate a mark of the Meſſiah, that it was a common periphraſis for his name. See Gerard's Diſſ. p. 184.

of

" of judgment, and that the Jews them-
" ſelves were the objects of that judgment.
" A ſign, ſays Jeſus, has frequently been
" aſked of me; I will now tell you what
" ſign ought to have been expected: if the
" Jews had known what it is, they would
" not have been ſo ſolicitous for it: it is
" very different from what they ſuppoſe it
" to be:—the whole Jewiſh nation ſhall be
" utterly diſſolved by the ſevere vengeance
" of God: this is *the ſign of the Son of Man*,
" which *ſhall appear in heaven*; for this is
" all that Daniel means by the Son of Man
" coming in the clouds of heaven, in the
" paſſage on which they found their ex-
" pectation of a ſign. On this occaſion,
" then, Jeſus not only aſſured them that
" the ſign which they looked for would
" not be given, but alſo pointed out where
" their miſtake lay, and explained the true
" meaning of the prophecy on which they
" founded it." See Gerard's Diſſertations, p. 203.

To add to the evidence that Dr. Gerard has given the true meaning of *the Son of Man coming in clouds*, or *in the clouds of heaven*, it muſt carefully be obſerved, that it was a direct and explicit anſwer to the

queſtion of the Diſciples, in the beginning of the chapter under conſideration—*What*, ſaid they *ſhall be* THE SIGN *of thy coming? Why*, ſays our Lord, *then ſhall appear* THE SIGN *of the Son of Man in heaven—the Son of Man coming*, not in the ſplendor of victory, and with the trophies of conqueſt, but *in clouds*, in the execution of thoſe judgments which, in the preceding part of the chapter, he had told them were coming upon their country.*

If

* Our Saviour's refuſing *a ſign* when it was demanded, has been, ſays Dr. Gerard, a great ſubject of objections, and has particularly been alledged as a proof that he was unwilling to give all the evidence of his miſſion which he might have given, or to ſatisfy the unſterſtandings of men. "*The Phariſees*, it is ſaid, *tempting him*, aſked a ſign; that "is, ſome teſtimonial of the truth of his declared miſſion: "And what did this requeſt produce? Why, he ſighed "deeply at their perverſeneſs, who were ſo hard to be con- "vinced, and ſtiled them a *fooliſh and adulterous generation* "for their preſumption. Now this deſiring a rational "evidence for their Diſcipleſhip, the ſeeking after a ſign, "as the ſcripture terms it, had, if he had indeed appealed "to their underſtandings, been ſo far from any thing crimi- "nal or blame-worthy, that it had been in all reaſon their "indiſpenſible duty; whereas it was, it ſeems, in faith, an "unwarrantable, preſumptuous, and wanton curioſity. "The coming deſirous to canvaſs the evidence, though "from no other principle perhaps, originally, than that of "gratifying a light curioſity, were, one would imagine, a "turn of mind to be favourably entertained, and carefully "cheriſhed in a novice, by any who was ſolicitous to gain "proſelytes by ſuch means, and conſcious of having any "thing

If there is ſatisfactory evidence, from the compariſon of our Lord's language in theſe two verſes, with that of the prophecies of the Old Teſtement, that he plainly borrowed it from them, it will from hence naturally and neceſſarily follow, that the Diſciples of Jeſus could not poſſibly underſtand him in any other ſenſe, than as deſcribing *temporal calamities*, and temporal calamities *only*, in oppoſition to the opinion which they had hitherto uniformly entertained, of his coming to render them victorious over all their enemies. It is, indeed, difficult to imagine how our Lord could have

" thing of the kind to produce to him. But, on the con-
" trary, we find our Maſter ever diſclaiming, with the ſevereſt
" reſentment, all followers of that complexion; and no
" temper checked and diſcouraged, with ſo conſtant an
" averſion, as this of, as it is opprobiouſly termed, *ſeeking*
" *a ſign.*"*

This objection, ſays Dr. Gerard, almoſt refutes itſelf, though we take not in the peculiar nature of the ſign which they demanded: The aſſertions that they aſked only *ſome* teſtimonial of his declared miſſion—that they deſired a *rational* evidence that this was the diſpoſition which Jeſus held criminal—are all ſo directly contradictory to the real circumſtances in which the demand was made, that they can ſcarce be imputed to other principles than want of candour and an intention to miſlead. From theſe circumſtances it is plain, that far from being poſſeſſed of this laudable temper, they were not impelled to make the de-

* Chriſtianity not founded on Argument, pp. 38. 49.

have expreſſed himſelf, ſo fully and ſo effectually to the purpoſe, upon ſo delicate and diſagreeable a ſubject, as by the adoption of a language with which they were ſo well acquainted, and the authority of which they could not poſſibly diſpute! To ſuppoſe, on the contrary, that theſe verſes are deſcriptive of *the final judgment of the world*, is indeed violently to ſever them from their manifeſt connection with the preceding and ſubſequent context—to violate all the rules of probability and juſt criticiſm, and to charge the Evangelical Hiſtorians with ſuch a confuſion of ideas, and ſuch a perverſion

mand, even by a principle ſo little blameable as *light curioſity*, but were actuated by perverſeneſs and prejudice, which had already made them withſtand the cleareſt evidence, and the greateſt miracles, and which it was in vain to expect to conquer by working more miracles: It was therefore as reaſonable to refuſe to work more, as it is, not to perſiſt in reaſoning with a man who ſhows that he reaſons only for the ſake of contention, without any concern to diſcover the truth. But when we recollect what was *the ſign* which they deſired, the objection is even abſurd. It was *a ſign* which they were led to expect, only by their falſe notions of a temporal Meſſiah: it was abſolutely inconſiſtent with the truth of the Meſſiah's character—to have given it, would have been to become ſuch a deliverer as the Jews expected: It was therefore impoſſible that it could be given. Inſtead of giving it, it was proper to affirm expreſsly, as Jeſus did affirm, that it never would be given, and that it did not belong to the Meſſiah juſtly conceived. See Gerard's Diſſertations, pp. 186-190.

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of language, as would indeed render them utterly unworthy of any regard; for as the learned Univerſity Preacher has very juſtly obſerved, " whenever the ſame word is " uſed, in the ſame ſentence, or in different " ſentences, not far diſtant from each other, " we ought to interpret it preciſely in the " ſame ſenſe, unleſs either that ſenſe ſhould " involve a contradiction of ideas—or the " Writer expreſsly informs us, that he re- " peats the word in a freſh acceptation."

How far this moſt excellent rule of ſound criticiſm has been adhered to, in the examination which has been made, not of the preceding part of this chapter only, but of the whole of the very important doctrine concerning *the coming of Chriſt*, the judicious Reader muſt judge for himſelf. If the ſmalleſt deviation from it can be detected, in any one of the paſſages which have been reviewed, there will be juſt ground for ſuſpicion, either of the ſubject not having had juſtice done it, or of the goodneſs of the foundation upon which the whole of the reaſoning, in the preceding pages, is built; for ſo far, at leaſt, as the connection of a diſcourſe is concerned, nothing can poſſibly juſtify a departure from a rule

which muſt have the approbation of every ingenuous mind!

If the judicious Reader is thoroughly ſatisfied, from the preceding arguments, of the cloſe connection of the twenty-ninth and thirtieth verſes of the chapter under conſideration, with the preceding part of it, and particularly with the queſtions of the Diſciples, he will probably have little difficulty in believing that this connection is continued in the following verſe, even though no farther evidence of ſuch a connection could be produced; which, however, as will preſently appear, is very far from being the caſe. v. 31. *And he* (the Son of Man) ſays the Evangeliſt, *ſhall ſend his angels*, or rather his meſſengers, as the Greek word properly ſignifies, and as it is tranſlated, Mark i. 2. vii. 24. *with a great ſound of a trumpet, and they ſhall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

If this verſe be, as ſome ſuppoſe, deſcriptive of the preſervation of the elect, in the midſt of the calamities which were coming upon the Jewiſh nation—it is, perhaps, not unworthy of remark, that this is not the only intimation of ſuch a pre-

preſervation in this chapter; for in the thirteenth verſe it is ſaid, *he that ſhall endure to the end, i. e.* ſhall continue faithful to me as the expected Meſſiah, till the end cometh, *the ſame ſhall be ſaved.* In the twenty-ſecond verſe it is ſaid, that *except thoſe days*, viz. the days of tribulation, *ſhould be ſhortened, there ſhould no fleſh be ſaved; but*, adds the Evangeliſt, *for the elect's ſake, thoſe days ſhall be ſhortened.* St. Luke ſays expreſsly, *When ye ſee theſe things*, the calamities which he had before been deſcribing, *begin to come to paſs, then look up and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*

But though it appears plainly from hence, that the faithful adherents of the Meſſiah were to expect deliverance from the calamities which were impending on the Jewiſh nation; yet the judicious Reader may perhaps be inclined to think it more probable, that as the two preceding verſes are deſcriptive of the total deſtruction of the Jewiſh ſtate and government, and of the complete abolition of the Moſaic inſtitution, the Evangeliſt intended to point out, under the character of *angels* or *meſſengers*, the ſending forth his Apoſtles and other miſſionaries, to announce, throughout the world,

world, the glad tidings of *the kingdom of heaven*, or of *the Meſſiah*, and to make converts to the Religion which, under that character, he was about to eſtabliſh. This ſenſe ſeems to be ſtrongly confirmed by the fore-cited paſſage of the Prophet Daniel, which connects *the coming in clouds*, with there being given to the Meſſiah, *dominion, and glory, and a kingdom*, which neceſſarily ſuppoſes the uſe of all proper means, the ſending of *angels* or *meſſengers*, to gather perſons from the four winds, from every quarter of the globe, to become the ſubjects of his kingdom. This connection ſeems to be perfectly natural, and agrees moſt exactly with the whole courſe of the preceding argument.

Which ever of theſe interpretations the judicious Reader may think the moſt deſerving of preference, the connection will thus far, at leaſt, be preſerved unbroken; and from the examination which has now been preſented to him, of this part of the chapter, and particularly of the twenty-ninth, thirtieth, and thirty-firſt verſes, will be ſeen, in a ſtrong point of view, the juſtneſs of the obſervations of Sir Iſaac Newton and of Biſhop Warburton, upon the figurative

rative language of prophecy, as deſcribing temporal calamities. The former obſerves that " in ſacred prophecy, the darkening, " ſmiting, or ſetting of the ſun, moon, and " ſtars, is put for the ceaſing of a king- " dom, or for the deſtruction thereof, pro- " portional to that darkneſs." The latter ſays, what every Reader of judgment and taſte cannot but be highly pleaſed with, as at once both elegant and juſt! that " this language was borrowed from the " antient hieroglyphic writing—the ſun, " moon, and ſtars, were uſed to repreſent " ſtates and empires, kings, queens, and " nobility, their eclipſes and extinction, " temporary diſaſters and entire overthrow, " &c. So in like manner the holy Prophets " call kings and empires by the names of " the heavenly luminaries—their misfor- " tunes and overthrow are repreſented by " eclipſes and extinction: Stars falling from " the firmament are employed to denote " the deſtruction of the nobility, &c. In a " word, the prophetic ſtile ſeems to be a " ſpeaking hieroglyphic. Theſe obſerva- " tions," the Biſhop adds, " will not only " aſſiſt us in the ſtudy of the Old and New " Teſtament, but likewiſe vindicate their

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" character from the illiterate cavils of " modern libertines, who have fooliſhly " miſtaken that for the peculiar workman- " ſhip of the Prophet's heated imagination, " which was the ſober and eſtabliſhed lan- " guage of their times, and which God " and his Son condeſcended to employ, as " the propereſt conveyance of the high " myſterious ways of Providence, in the " Revelation of themſelves to mankind." See Warburton's Divine Legation, vol ii. book 4. ſect. 4.

If the evidence which has now been laid before the Reader, that the whole of the predictions in the preceding part of this chapter, relate *ſolely* to the calamities which were coming upon the Jewiſh nation, be deemed ſufficient, the following verſes cannot fail, in the ſtrongeſt manner, to confirm this ſenſe; and they will, at the ſame time, afford ſome farther ſtriking and unequivocal proofs of the genuine benevolence and humanity of our Lord's character, in interweaving with the awful denuntiations of the utter extinction of the Jews as a nation, the ſtrongeſt aſſurances of *his coming* as *the Meſſiah*. How peculiarly neceſſary theſe aſſurances were, after ſuch an affecting

picture

picture of the effects of the divine vengeance, may be eaſily imagined! v. 32. *Now*, when theſe things which he had before been deſcribing, in terms ſo awfully grand, are coming to paſs, *learn a parable of the fig-tree:* When its branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that ſummer is nigh. So likewiſe ye, when ye ſhall ſee all theſe things, know that it is near, even at the doors.* St. Mark's expreſſion is very little different from that of St. Matthew, ch. xiii. 29. *So ye, in like manner, when ye ſhall ſee theſe things come to paſs, know that it is nigh, even at the doors!* If there is any ambiguity in the uſe of the pronoun *It*, in theſe two paſſages, that ambiguity will happily be removed by comparing them with the parallel paſſage of St. Luke, ch. xxi. 31. *So likewiſe ye, when ye ſee theſe things*, the things which he had juſt been relating, *come to paſs, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.*

Here is ſo marked a condeſcenſion to the prejudices and peculiar ſentiments of the Diſciples, relative to *the coming* of *the Meſſiah*, that it is truly wonderful, after having

* The opening of the parable, as it ſtands in St. Luke, ſhows that Chriſt did not inſtance in the budding of the fig-tree only, but that of *all the trees*, as a ſign of approaching ſummer. Townſon's Diſcourſes, p. 48. 8vo. edit.

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compared theſe paſſages together, how they could poſſibly have been miſtaken, or that any meaning but that of *the coming* of Jeſus, in the character of *the Meſſiah*, ſhould be affixed to them; eſpecially as this was the primary object of the enquiry of the Diſciples—*When ſhall theſe things be, and what ſhall be the ſign of thy coming?* But the learned Univerſity Preacher, in a note referring to this very paſſage of St. Luke, quotes Dr. Sykes, as very readily allowing, that "by "the kingdom of God we are here to un- "derſtand, its glorious ſtate and perfection "in a future world." And what is particularly remarkable, the learned Univerſity Preacher has peremptorily aſſerted, that "any other interpretation would be ut- "terly groundleſs." See Edwards's Sermon, p. 33. It muſt not, however, be forgotten by the judicious and attentive Reader, that the foundation of the reaſoning which hath been adopted throughout the whole of the preceding pages, and which has never, for a moment, been loſt ſight of, is the language which our Lord originally made uſe of, upon his entrance on his public miniſtry, namely, that *the kingdom of heaven*, or *of God*, was *at hand*; and the moſt unequivocal and

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ſatisfactory evidence has been laid before the Reader, that, in the eſtimation of Chriſt's own Diſciples, his kingdom was not *yet come*, in the ſenſe in which they expected it *to come!* Nay, in this very chapter under conſideration, and in the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke, Chriſt thought it abſolutely neceſſary, again and again to caution them againſt deceivers, who ſhould aſſume the character of *the Meſſiah*. How then, it may ſurely, with the utmoſt propriety, be aſked, was it poſſible for the Diſciples to underſtand him, in the ſenſe here contended for by theſe learned Divines? But the confutation of this very abſurd opinion, ſo injurious to Chriſtianity, lies within a ſtill narrower compaſs, and will, it is preſumed, thoroughly ſatisfy the diſpaſſionate enquirer, that they have totally miſtaken the meaning of this paſſage; for if there was no other evidence of this, the verſe immediately following would, it is apprehended, be fully ſufficient for the purpoſe; eſpecially when it is remarked, that it has the concurrent teſtimony of both the other Evangeliſts. v. 34. *Verily I ſay unto you, this generation ſhall not paſs away, till all theſe things*, of which THE COMING

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD was certainly one *be fulfilled.* And, as if they all thought this declaration was not ſufficiently ſtrong, and they were determined it ſhould make the ſtrongeſt impreſſion which language could convey, they add—*Heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, but my words ſhall not paſs away.* Of what uſe is language, if ſuch expreſſions muſt ſtand for nothing!

The late Biſhop Newton was ſo ſtrongly impreſſed with the emphaſis of this language, that he thus forcibly expreſſes himſelf upon this ſubject. "It is to me a "wonder how any man can refer part of "the foregoing diſcourſe to the deſtruction "of Jeruſalem, and part to the end of the "world, or to any other diſtant event, "when it is here ſaid, ſo poſitively, in the "concluſion—*All theſe things ſhall be fulfilled* "*in this generation.* It ſeemeth as if our "Saviour was aware of ſome ſuch miſap-"plication of his words, by adding yet "greater emphaſis to his affirmation, v. 35. "*Heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, but my* "*words ſhall not paſs away.*"

It is truly aſtoniſhing, that the learned Biſhop, having thus ſtrongly expreſſed his ſurprize that any one could refer part of the

the foregoing diſcourſe to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, and part *to the end of the world*, or to any other diſtant event, ſhould himſelf, preſently afterwards, aſſert that ſome of theſe paſſages, particularly verſes twenty-nine, thirty, and thirty-one, in a figurative ſenſe, may be underſtood of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, but that, in a literal ſenſe, they can be meant only of *the end of the world*; for nothing can be clearer than that the Prophets, in a thouſand inſtances, and after them our Saviour, ſpeak in a metaphorical, without in the leaſt regarding the literal, ſenſe of their expreſſions: And that they did ſo, in the paſſages here referred to, is plain, from the compariſon of them, which has been laid before the Reader; for there is not the ſmalleſt reaſon for ſuppoſing that they had any view to *the end of the world* and *the general judgment*, and that our Saviour himſelf had no ſuch view, his declaration that it was among the things which were to happen *in that generation*, is, if any thing can be, a deciſive proof! for this expreſſion will have equal force, whether theſe verſes are underſtood *figuratively* or *literally*, and will equally militate againſt the Biſhop's aſſertion!

Again, the ſame learned Prelate ſays, " the conſiſtence and connection of the " diſcourſe oblige us to underſtand it, as " ſpoken of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*; but, " in a higher ſenſe, it may be true alſo of " the time of *the end of the world*, and of the " general judgment." But ſurely the conſiſtence and connection of a diſcourſe are the only true criteria of the meaning of any Writer, and to adopt a meaning which is not ſupported by theſe, is to do no honor to the ſacred Writers; but, on the contrary, to introduce a confuſion which muſt be highly prejudicial to the intereſts of truth!

With a like ſtrength of language with that of Biſhop Newton, Dr. Macknight, in his Harmony of the Evangeliſts, has obſerved, that " our Lord has forbidden us " to underſtand any part of this prophecy " *primarily* of the deſtruction of the world, " having connected all its parts in ſuch a " manner, that the things foretold, what- " ever they are, muſt have happened in " cloſe ſucceſſion. For any interpreter," he adds, " to correct Chriſt's language here, " and ſay that, in the twenty-ninth verſe, " *immediately after*, ſignifies two or three " thou-

" thouſand years after, and that, in the " thirty-fourth verſe, *all theſe things*, ſignifies " only *ſome* of them, is a liberty which " cannot ſafely be taken with his words." But why, it may be aſked, did Dr. Macknight, in this very impreſſive paſſage, inſert the word *primarily*; for his reaſoning will ſurely apply as pointedly againſt a *ſecondary*, as againſt a *primary* application, which he, ſo juſtly, thinks *improper* and *unſafe*; for it will ſtill remain true, that our Lord has connected all the parts of this prophecy in ſuch a manner, that the things foretold, whatever they are, muſt have happened in cloſe ſucceſſion, or *in that generation*.

It certainly is not a very pleaſant office to animadvert upon the inconſiſtencies of Writers of ſuch eminence in the literary world, who have ſo meritoriouſly diſtinguiſhed themſelves in the Chriſtian cauſe; but it muſt be remembered, that men of great note, when they fall into miſtakes, may, by the ſanction of their names, ſtamp a degree of credit, even upon error, which may be of the moſt ſerious conſequences to the intereſts of truth. This ſeems, but too plainly, to have been the caſe in the preſent inſtance; for even Mr. Kett, the lateſt

writer upon the ſubject of the prophecy contained in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, and the parallel chapters, ſays, " By the parable of the fig-tree, our " Lord aſſures his Diſciples, that the ſigns " *immediately* preceding the deſtruction of " Jeruſalem, ſhould be ſo plain, that the " moſt common attention to paſſing events " would enable them to ſee, and to avoid " the impending evils which he had as " plainly foretold; and immediately adds, " *Verily I ſay unto you, this generation ſhall* " *not paſs away till all theſe things be fulfilled.* " Theſe words therefore ſeem obviouſly re- " ſtricted, in their *primary* ſenſe, to the " numerous circumſtances which he had " moſt accurately deſcribed as *ſigns* of that " event in which his Diſciples felt them- " ſelves peculiarly, nay perſonally, in- " tereſted." And yet Mr. Kett has aſſerted, as has already been noticed, after having quoted St. Mark's account, that " the pa- " rallel paſſages of Matthew and Luke, " plainly indicate that this enquiry (of " the Diſciples) reſpected *the deſtruction of* " *Jeruſalem, the ſecond coming of our Lord,* " and *the end of the world*—events," ſays he, " which they poſſibly expected to happen

" to-

" together, and to which the reply of our " Lord evidently refers." What can be termed inconſiſtencies, if theſe are not?

Mr. King, the Author of Morſels of Criticiſm, in order, as it ſhould ſeem, to avoid the difficulty which theſe Writers, and particularly the two former, felt ſo forcibly to oppoſe the interpretation of our Lord's prophecy of any other event than *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, has given a different meaning to the word *generation*, in the thirty-fourth verſe, " In its true etymological ſignification," he ſays, " γενεα means, ſurely, much rather, *this* " *race of mankind*, or *this mode of mens exiſting* " *upon earth, in the preſent life*, than *this one* " *particular generation*, according to the " vulgar acceptation." But, with all due ſubmiſſion, the original words *age* or *generation*, as Dr. Whitby has well obſerved, never bear any other ſenſe, in the New Teſtament, than *the men of this age*. Thus Matt. xi. 16. *To whom ſhall I liken* γενεαν ταυτην THE MEN OF THIS AGE? ch. xii. 42. *The Queen of the South ſhall riſe up in judgment* μετα γενεας ταυτης, *with* THE MEN OF THIS AGE; and verſe 45. *So ſhall it be* τη γενεα τη πονηρα, *with the wicked* OF THIS AGE. Mark viii. 12. τι η γενεα αυτη, *Why do the men* OF THIS AGE

ſeek a ſign? No ſign ſhall be given τη γενεα ταυτη, *to the men* OF THIS AGE. But the paſſage the moſt remarkable to this purpoſe, is Matt. xxiii. 36, where Chriſt had been denouncing heavy woes upon the Jewiſh nation, and therefore could only be applied to the judgments which were coming upon them at *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. All theſe things ſhall come* επι την γενεαν ταυτην *upon the men* OF THIS AGE; which, the attentive Reader will obſerve, is almoſt exactly the ſame expreſſion with that in the verſe under conſideration!*

"But," ſays Mr. King, "if the words "muſt really be taken (as uſually under-"ſtood by Commentators) to ſignify the "aggregate of the perſons then living, it "is difficult, and almoſt impoſſible, to ſay "*what* could be deemed *the generation*, con-"ſidering the conſtant ſucceſſion which "there is of the human ſpecies, in every, "even the ſhorteſt, period of years. Who "were the perſons, and at what age of life "are we to begin to reckon, with regard

* If the expreſſion in the one inſtance means the men of the age to whom our Lord addreſſed himſelf, no reaſon can poſſibly be aſſigned why it ſhould not be ſo applied in the other!

"to

" to thoſe who were to form *the generation* " that was *not* to paſs away till the de- " ſtruction of Jeruſalem?" What is all this but mere ſophiſtry, and an endeavour to render *obſcure*, what every one of common ſenſe and common underſtanding has a perfectly accurate idea of? If, on the contrary, Mr. King's definition of the meaning of the word *generation* be adopted, what kind of an anſwer to the queſtion of the Diſciples, *when ſhall theſe things be*, does this thirty-fourth verſe contain? *This race of men*, or *this mode of men's exiſting upon the earth in the preſent life*, ſhall not paſs away till all theſe things be fulfilled. Did this require ſo ſolemn an aſſeveration as the following, to make it credible? *Heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, but my words ſhall not paſs away!**

Upon this unnatural, not to ſay *abſurd*, interpretation, does Mr. King reſt his concluſion, that " our Lord therefore, by theſe " words,

* A Writer in the Theological Repoſitory, whoſe ſignature is Idiota, ſays, " Why ſhould not the word (genera- " tion) be taken in its uſual ſenſe, in the paſſage in queſtion, " as, in that ſignification, it contains a plain anſwer to the " queſtion of the Diſciples; but, if it be interpreted of the " Jewiſh nation, it conveys no anſwer at all! The nation " of the Jews ſhall not periſh till all theſe things are ful-

" words, ſurely muſt have intended ſome-
" thing more;" (than *the deſtruction of Jeru-ſalem*) " even to aſſure us, he would come
" again *during the continuance of the earth in*
" *its preſent ſtate*; and to diſtinguiſh *that*
" *coming* from *the end of the world*, concern-
" ing which he was immediately going to
" ſpeak in the third place.*

But perhaps there is no inſtance, in the annals of Chriſtian Literature, of the difficulties in which learned men find themſelves involved in conſidering this prophecy of our Lord, as relating to different events, more remarkable than that of Mr. Houghton, the ingenious Author of two Sermons upon this ſubject; for having pointed out ſome differences in the accounts of the Evangeliſts, which, however, as will appear hereafter, exiſt only in his own imagination, he ſays, " From theſe differences among
" the Evangeliſts, it is evident that they
" ſpoke of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem and

" filled—What anſwer is this to the enquiry of the Diſci-
" ples—*When ſhall theſe things be?* v. 33. Our Saviour in-
" timates that ſome of the Diſciples ſhould live to ſee the
" ſigns and fore-runners of his coming. Now what con-
" nection has the continuance of the Jewiſh people, with
" the Diſciples ſeeing the ſigns and fore-runners of that
" event? See Theolog. Repoſit. p. 154.

* Morſels of Criticiſm, p. 272.

" of

" of the end of the world promiſcuouſly,
" and conſequently, that they conſidered
" theſe two periods as one and the ſame.
" But this," ſays he, " will appear in a
" ſtill ſtronger light, from one part of our
" Saviour's diſcourſe, in which they all
" agree. *Immediately*, ſays Matthew, *after*
" *the tribulation of thoſe days, ſhall they ſee the*
" *Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven,*
" *with power and great glory! And he ſhall*
" *ſend his angels with a great ſound of a trumpet,*
" *and they ſhall gather together his elect from*
" *the four winds, from one end of heaven to the*
" *other*; expreſſions perfectly correſponding
" to thoſe uſed in the next chapter, where
" there can be no doubt that it is the day
" of judgment which is ſpoken of—*When*
" *the Son of Man ſhall come in his glory, and*
" *all the holy angels with him, then ſhall he ſit*
" *upon the throne of his glory, and before him*
" *ſhall be gathered all nations.* But when we
" imagine that we have been hearing of
" the laſt grand cataſtrophe of nature, it is
" added, *Verily I ſay unto you, this generation*
" *ſhall not paſs, till all theſe things be fulfilled.*
" In the ſame manner Mark and Luke,
" while evidently diſcourſing of the calami-
" ties of the Jews, ſeem to riſe, by a ſudden

" tran-

" tranſition, from the period of the Jewiſh
" ſtate, to that of the world itſelf, and de-
" ſcribe the coming of our Saviour in terms
" nearly ſimilar, and equally ſublime; yet
" all, with one conſent, refer the whole to
" that preſent generation."*

This ſeems to be a faithful repreſentation of the difficulties and embarraſſments which are inſeparable from the application of our Lord's prophecy to different events, and they are ſuch as might be imagined, of themſelves, ſufficient to alienate the minds of all thinking men from an interpretation ſo replete with abſurdities! Very different, however, is the concluſion which this Writer draws from this ſubject.—" Our
" Saviour's predictions," ſays he, " are no
" ambiguous oracles—contain no general
" and vague deſcription—no abſcure lan-
" guage, which may be applied to almoſt
" any event, and admits of a thouſand artful
" explanations—but preſent us with the
" moſt perſpicuous, accurate, and even pictu-
" reſque delineation of ſcenes which were
" afterwards diſplayed before the eyes of in-
" numerable multitudes, at the very period
" which he had likewiſe diſtinctly ſpecified."†

* See Houghton's Sermons, pp. 225-6 † Ibid. pp. 205-6.

The

The difficulties which Mr. Houghton appears ſo acutely to feel, in reviewing this important ſubject, neceſſarily lead him to the ſame concluſion with Mr. Kett and Dr. Prieſtley; the former of whom ſays, that the Diſciples poſſibly expected the events predicted by our Lord were to happen together: the latter, that our Saviour's prophecy was delivered in anſwer to a queſtion put to him by his Diſciples, which reſpected both the events, on the idea of their being co-incident.

In like manner Mr. Houghton aſks—"What then can we infer from ſuch lofty "deſcriptions, conſiſting of images ſo applicable to the general judgment of the "world, which are, notwithſtanding, limited "to that preſent generation, and conſequently incapable of repreſenting any "thing beyond the period of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; but that the "Writers had aſſociated both ideas together in their own imagination!"*

If, from the examination which has been preſented to the Reader in the preceding pages, he ſhould be inclined to believe that the evidence is ſufficient, that our Lord

* Houghton's Sermons, p. 227.

con-

confined his prediction to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, and to that only, he cannot fail to feel a ſenſible ſatisfaction, to be relieved from difficulties which cannot but have an unfavorable influence upon the mind; for however men, in their zeal for Chriſtianity, may attempt to gloſs over theſe difficulties, and even to turn them into arguments for the truth of Chriſtianity—yet theſe attempts will be fruitleſs, and leave ſuſpicions, even in their own minds, which muſt have an unfriendly influence on the cauſe of truth!

It cannot but be deſerving of attention, in the midſt of the embarraſſments and perplexities which theſe Writers have ſo ſtrongly diſcovered, ariſing from the ſtrong language of our Saviour, that *all the things* which he had before been deſcribing, were to happen *in that generation*—that all of them, Mr. King excepted, ſo far as they are conſiſtent with themſelves, admit that our Lord alludes ſolely to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*. This, indeed, cannot be denied, without denying the plaineſt evidence, without totally diſregarding the whole connection, without in ſhort groſsly offending againſt all the rules of language! With this de-

deſtruction our Lord conſtantly connected the coming of his kingdom; and he here aſſerts, in plain and unequivocal language, that when they ſaw theſe things come to paſs, they would perceive the approach thereof, by the ſigns which he had pointed out to them, with as much clearneſs as they would perceive that *ſummer was nigh by the trees putting forth leaves.* v. 32, 33. *Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when its branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that ſummer is nigh. So likewiſe ye, when ye ſhall ſee all theſe things, know that it is near, even at the doors.*

But though our Lord here aſſerts that the time was haſtening on, for the completion of his prediction, and though he told them it would happen *in that generation*, yet beyond that, he goes on to aſſure them, their knowledge did not extend. The exact moment, or period, when this judgment ſhould be executed, he tells them, lay hid in the boſom of the Father. v. 36. *Of that day and hour knoweth no man—no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.* St. Mark's words are, ch. xiii. 32. *neither the Son, but the Father.**

St.

* Ambroſe, in his Treatiſe de Fide, ſays Biſhop Pearce, ſays, veteres non habent codices Græci, quod nec filius ſcit; which

St. Luke, it is remarkable, hath nothing parallel.*

It muſt be acknowledged, that the current of the opinion of the learned is, that our Lord ſpeaks here, not of the time of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, but of that ſtill more awful event, *the day of final retribution*. But if it hath been ſatisfactorily proved, that our Lord had hitherto but one object in view, viz. *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, and the conſequent erection of the Meſſiah's kingdom—may it not, with becoming deference, be aſked, whether he can be thought to have been ſo looſe and inaccurate a reaſoner, as to have made ſo ſudden and abrupt a tranſition as this opinion ſuppoſes? Can it be imagined that he ſhould break through the fundamental rules of ſound reaſoning, by apparently referring to ſomething which he had ſaid before, and which he had ſo poſitively aſſerted, was to

which is the ſame as to ſay, that the words *ουδε ο υιος* were not found in antient Greek MSS. of his days, in thoſe at leaſt which he had ſeen; but at preſent they are found in all of them. See Biſhop Pearce's note on Mark xiii. 32.

* Mr. Kett quotes this paſſage thus: Of that day and hour (when the heavens ſhall paſs away) knoweth no man, &c. And in the note below, he ſpeaks of it as "a diſtant "day and hour when the heavens and the earth ſhall paſs "away."

happen

happen *in that generation*, when, in reality, he was beginning a new ſubject, and pointing out an event which was not to happen till many thouſands of years had paſſed away?

Mr. Edward King, the Author of Morſels of Criticiſm, ſo often mentioned in the preceding pages, in commenting upon this thirty-ſixth verſe, ſays, "We need not heſitate to affirm, that to apply theſe words "to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem* (which was "to happen while ſome of the perſons "who heard the words were ſtill living) "muſt be very ſtrange and improper indeed; ſince we know that it was our "Lord's profeſſed intention, that ſuch of "the Jews as believed and remembered his "words, ſhould be effectually warned, and "ſhould eſcape and ſave themſelves by "flight: and do moreover know, that they "actually did take the warning and do ſo."*

This reaſoning of Mr. King, however plauſible it may, at firſt ſight, appear, will not, on a cloſe inſpection, be found to have the ſmalleſt force in it; for where, it may be aſked, was the ſtrangeneſs or impropriety of our Lord's ſaying, even of that event

* Morſels of Criticiſm, p. 274.

which

which he wiſhed his Diſciples to guard againſt, and to eſcape from, *Of that day and hour knoweth no man.* They had aſked him, and he had told them, very frankly and fully, what *the ſigns* and tokens of that awful cataſtrophe would be! To this he gave them a general anſwer, in the thirty-fourth and thirty-fifth verſes, attended with the moſt ſolemn aſſurances which the power of language could convey, that it would be *in that generation*; but, ſays he, in the verſe imediately following—Of the preciſe day and hour when it ſhall happen, I have nothing to inform you—that is not neceſſary to your ſafety—you have ſufficient information of the means of eſcape, if you will make a proper uſe of them! I tell you therefore *to watch*, and for this reaſon *eſpecially*, becauſe you *know neither the day nor the hour* when it ſhall be! So far is this from ſtrangeneſs or impropriety, that a better, or a more natural argument for *watchfulneſs*, could not poſſibly have been ſuggeſted, by the moſt ſagacious reaſoner; for had they known the preciſe time *when* that event was to have happened, where would have been the neceſſity for *watchfulneſs?* In that caſe, they would only have had

had to remember the time which he had fixed for its accompliſhment, and they would have been ſufficiently prepared for avoiding the impending danger.

Dr. Prieſtley, in his Faſt Sermon before quoted, thinks this very paſſage, *of that day and hour*, refers to *the preſent times*, and to the events which are now paſſing in the world, as preparatory to what Mr. Kett, as it ſhould ſeem, calls *the ſecond coming* of Chriſt. But Mr. King ſays, that " to apply " theſe words to our Lord's *ſecond coming* as " their ſole, final intention, ſeems alſo no " leſs ſtrange," viz than he thinks it is to apply them to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem : " when throughout the prophecies both of " the Old and New Teſtament, ſo many " notices are given to us that there is a " period fixed, about which time this *ſecond* " great advent is to be expected : and when " moreover both thoſe great Prophets, " Daniel and St. John, even give us certain " limits and numbers, by means of which, " thoſe who are ſkilful in underſtanding the " words of prophecy, may be enabled to form " ſome very *near gueſſes*, and well grounded " expectations."* Mr. King therefore con-

* Morſels of Criticiſm, p. 274.

 cludes,

cludes, that " the words of this thirty-ſixth " verſe muſt ſurely therefore, in their *ulti-* " *mate* and moſt important deſignation, " refer to ſome other great event, which " *great event* muſt needs be, *what* the Diſci- " ples indeed originally meant to enquire " after; namely, *the end of the world*,* or the " end and perfecting of the day of judg- " ment, or the total deſtruction of the pre- " ſent ſcene of things on earth; which, we " may from hence infer, was ſo far from " being connected, either with the de- " ſtruction of Jeruſalem, or with *the ſecond* " *coming* of our Lord, that (although it be " an event which is really to come to paſs) " yet it is indeed at ſo vaſt a diſtance, that " even the angels of heaven, who excel in " knowledge, cannot at preſent limit the " period." Morſels of Criticiſm, p. 275.

When learned men are regardleſs of the connection and occaſion of the diſcourſe, and ſet at nought all the rules of grammatical conſtruction, the language of Scripture will become as pliant and accommodating as will ſuit any hypotheſis, however

* It is remarkable that St. Luke has an expreſſion preciſely of the ſame import, when deſcribing this very calamity, ch. xxi. 35. that it ſhould come *as a ſnare* upon all that dwelt on the face of the whole land.

abſurd,

abſurd, or however contrary to the true ſenſe of Scripture which they may chuſe to adopt. And that both Mr. King and Dr. Prieſtley have been too guilty of this, in the preſent inſtance, cannot be rendered more obvious, or more ſatisfactory, than by ſtating our Lord's argument, in the verſe under conſideration, at full length, as it ſtands in its connection in the chapter itſelf!

Let it but be recollected, that the queſtion of the Diſciples was—*When ſhall theſe things be, and what ſhall be the ſign of thy coming?* and the connection will be abundantly evident. Our Lord's general anſwer to this queſtion is in the thirty-fourth verſe—*This generation ſhall not paſs, till all theſe things*, the things of which he had before been ſpeaking, *ſhall be fulfilled.* And, to confirm the certainty of this prediction, he adds, in terms the moſt energetic, v. 35. *Heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, but my words ſhall not paſs away.* In the verſe immediately following, it is ſaid, v. 36. *Of that day and hour*, when theſe things ſhall happen, (for that is plainly the elipſis to be ſupplied, otherwiſe here is a relative without an antecedent, or in plainer terms, an apparent reference to ſomething which was ſaid before, when,

in reality, it has no relation to it) *Of that day and hour knoweth no man; no not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.* In the thirty-ſeventh verſe, the connection is ſtill carried on with a preciſion which would do honor to the cloſeſt reaſoner. *Ye know,* ſaith our Lord, *neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh—but* this know, that *as the days of Noah were, ſo ſhall alſo the coming of the Son of Man be*; that is, ſuddenly, and in a moment when they thought not of it.* This laſt expreſſion, uſed by the Evangeliſt, ſuggeſts an additional argument for the ſenſe here contended for, and indeed appears to be abſolutely deciſive; for *the coming of the Son of Man* uniformly means, in the preceding part of the chapter, and in ſome other very remarkable paſſages, *the coming of the Meſſiah*; in ſome of which, it is explicitly aſſerted, that his coming would be *in that generation.* Matt. xxiv. 27. *As the lightning cometh out of the eaſt, and*

* With the ſuddenneſs of *the coming of the Son of Man*, mentioned by St. Matthew, the account of St. Luke harmonizes very exactly; for, ſays he, ch. xxi. 35. *that day ſhall come upon you* UNAWARES; *for*, he adds, in the following verſe, *as a ſnare ſhall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth*, or rather of the whole land, viz. of the whole land of Judea, which, in the twenty-firſt verſe, he had particularly mentioned by name.

ſhineth

ſhineth even unto the weſt—ſo ſhall alſo the coming of THE SON OF MAN *be.* v. 30. *They ſhall ſee* THE SON OF MAN *coming in the clouds of heaven.* Matt. x. 23. *Ye ſhall not have gone over the cities of Iſrael till* THE SON OF MAN *be come.* xvi. 28. *Verily I ſay unto you, there be ſome ſtanding here who ſhall not taſte of death till they ſee* THE SON OF MAN *coming in his kingdom.* The reſemblance of *the coming of the Son of Man,* in point of ſuddenneſs, to the ſtate of things in the time of Noah, is farther illuſtrated in the following manner, in the verſes next enſuing. v. 38, 39. *For, as in the days which were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not, until the flood came, and took them all away—ſo ſhall alſo the coming of* THE SON OF MAN *be.* v. 40, 41, 42. *Then,* at that time, *ſhall two be in the field—the one ſhall be taken and the other left. Two women ſhall be grinding at the mill—the one ſhall be taken and the other left.*

The concluſion which the ſuddenneſs of this event naturally led to was, that they ſhould be as guarded againſt ſurprize, as thoſe who were before the flood ought to have been, if they wiſhed to avoid being

ſwept away by it. Our Lord evidently conſidered it in this light.—He therefore, with ſingular propriety, adds, v. 42. *Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come: but know this, that if the good man of the houſe had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have ſuffered his houſe to have been broken open. Therefore be ye alſo ready; for in ſuch an hour as ye think not* (for they knew neither the day nor the hour) *the Son of Man cometh.*

The whole of this argument is ſo evidently an exhortation to watchfulneſs for *the coming of* THE SON OF MAN, that it cannot be diſputed; and as by *the coming of the Son of Man* is evidently meant *the coming of the Meſſiah*, the inference will naturally and neceſſarily be, that it is a continuation of our Lord's anſwer to the queſtion of the Diſciples—*When ſhall theſe things be, and what ſhall be the ſign of thy coming, and of the end of the world*, or age?

Were there no other evidences than what has now been laid before the Reader, that the whole of this chapter, and particularly the thirty-ſixth and following verſes, relate *ſolely* to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem *excluſively*, both of a *ſecond coming* and of *the*

end

end of the world; it would, it may be preſumed, be fully ſufficient to ſatisfy every unprejudiced and impartial enquirer! But, beſides this, there is ſome collateral evidence of no trifling value, which muſt not be overlooked, particularly as it will afford a favorable opportunity of conſidering the meaning of ſome other paſſages which appear to have an immediate and direct relation to the main object of this work,

This collateral evidence is contained in the ſeventeenth chapter of St. Luke, which it is of the more importance to attend to, as it has been aſſerted, that in this chapter "we find almoſt the ſame expreſſions applied, not to the period in which Jeruſalem ſhould be deſtroyed, but to the day "in which the Son of Man ſhould be revealed. And that by this revelation of "the Son of Man, we are to underſtand "the period of his coming to judge the "world, appears from its being introduced "in the ſame manner, and illuſtrated by "the ſame compariſons that are uſed by "Matthew, when ſpeaking of the day "which no man knoweth, but which is "known to God only."*

* See Houghton's Sermons, p. 224.

This aſſertion is ſtrictly true, that the revelation of the Son of Man is introduced, at leaſt *nearly*, in the ſame manner, and illuſtrated by the ſame compariſons, that are uſed by Matthew, when ſpeaking of the day which no man knoweth, but which is known to God only; but whether the period of his *coming to judge the world* is to be underſtood by the language of the Evangeliſt, in this chapter, will admit of ſome doubt, and can only be determined by a patient inveſtigation of the queſtion of the Phariſees, and of the anſwer which our Lord gave to their queſtion.

The queſtion of the Phariſees, together with our Lord's general anſwer to it, is thus ſtated by the Evangeliſt, ch. xvii. 20. *And when he was demanded of the Phariſees when the kingdom of God ſhould come, he anſwered them and ſaid —The kingdom of God cometh not with obſervation; neither ſhall they ſay—Lo here, or lo there—for behold the kingdom of God is within you.*

If the meaning of the queſtion of the Phriſees is to be determined by the known and acknowledged ſentiments and prejudices of the Jewiſh nation, there cannot poſſibly be any doubt that their enquiry was WHEN *the kingdom of the Meſſiah* would be

be ſet up. Could this be doubted, the twenty-firſt verſe, juſt repeated, would afford the fulleſt ſatisfaction that this is the fact; for this very language is uſed in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, and moſt certainly was intended as a caution againſt being drawn away by the arts of deceivers, when the approaching calamities which our Lord had predicted would lead many to aſſume the character of *the Meſſiah*. v. 23. *Then if any man ſhall ſay unto you—Lo here is Chriſt, or there, believe him not; for there ſhall ariſe falſe Chriſts and falſe Prophets.*

To give any farther proof that the queſtion of the Phariſees related to *the coming of the Meſſiah*, would be to fatigue the Reader unneceſſarily, after what has been ſo often repeated! It will be more to the purpoſe to compare the arguments of the two Evangeliſts together, where they are ſimilar, that the judicious Reader may be able to perceive, in the cleareſt manner, that they both deſcribe one and the ſame event, particularly as that event is connected with *the coming of the Meſſiah*! That this may be ſeen to the greateſt poſſible advantage, they are here preſented to the Reader's view, in two oppoſite columns.

The

The queſtions of the Diſciples were, Matt. xxiv. 3.

When ſhall theſe things be, and what ſhall be the ſign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

The anſwer in St. Matthew is, v. 27.

As the lightning cometh out of the eaſt, and ſhineth even unto the weſt—ſo ſhall alſo the coming of the Son of Man be.

St. Matthew's cautions againſt deception are, v. 23. 24. 25.

Then if any man ſhall ſay unto you—Lo here is Chriſt, or the Meſſiah, *or there, believe him not; for there ſhall ariſe falſe Chriſts and falſe Prophets*, &c. *Behold I have told you before.*

The demand of the Phariſees was, Luke xvii. 20.

When the kingdom of God ſhould come?

That of St. Luke is, v. 24.

As the lightning that lightneth out of the one part under heaven, ſhineth unto the other part under heaven—ſo ſhall alſo the Son of Man be in his day.

St. Luke's cautions are, v. 20. 21.

The kingdom of God cometh not with obſervation: neither ſhall they ſay—Lo here or lo there—for behold the kingdom of God is within, or among, *you. And he ſaid unto the Diſciples—the days will come when ye ſhall deſire to ſee one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye ſhall not ſee it.*

The ſuddenneſs of the coming of the Meſſiah is thus expreſſed, Matt. v. 37. 38.

As the days of Noah were, ſo ſhall alſo the coming of the Son of Man be; for in the days which were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away: ſo ſhall alſo the coming of the Son of Man be.

Matt. v. 17. 18. 40. 41.

Let him who is on the houſe top not come down to take any thing out of of his houſe; neither let him who is in the field return back to take his clothes.

Then ſhall two be in the field, the one ſhall be taken and the other left. Two women ſhall be

The like ſuddenneſs of the coming of the Meſſiah is expreſſed by St. Luke, v. 26. 27. 30.

As it was in the days of Noah, ſo ſhall it be alſo in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and deſtroyed them all. Even thus ſhall it be when the Son of Man is revealed.

Luke, v. 31. 34. 35.

In that day, he who ſhall be upon the houſe top, and his ſtuff in the houſe, let him not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewiſe not return back!

I tell you, in that night there ſhall be two men in one bed, the one ſhall be taken and the other left.

*grinding at the mill, the one ſhall be taken and the other left.**	*Two women ſhall be grinding at the mill, the one ſhall be taken and the other left. Two men ſhall be in the field, the one ſhall be taken and the other left.*
v. 28.	v. 37.
For whereſoever the carcaſe is, there ſhall the eagles be gathered together.	*Whereſoever the carcaſe is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.*

From this compariſon, various obſervations very naturally ariſe, which ſeem ſtrongly to confirm the reaſoning which has been adopted, in the examination of the twenty-fourth of St. Matthew, and the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke.

The firſt obſervation is, that both the Diſciples of Jeſus and the Phariſees, being Jews, had the ſame prejudices, and the ſame expectations; their enquiries very naturally turned upon the ſame ſubject, viz. upon *the coming of the Meſſiah*; which as naturally led our Lord, in both inſtances, to caution them againſt deceivers who ſhould aſſume that character. This is ſuf-

* Mr. Kett appears very unwarrantably to have applied theſe verſes to a period which is ſtill future. vol. ii. p. 254.

ficiently

ficiently manifeſt from their ſeveral queſtions; but this obſervation has already been anticipated, and nothing more is neceſſary to be added about it.

A ſecond obſervation which ariſes from this compariſon is, that it appears with great force of evidence, that *the coming of the Son of Man*, the *day when the Son of Man ſhall be revealed*, and the *ſeeing one of the days of the Son of Man*, are only different forms of expreſſion, all ſignifying the *coming of the Meſſiah*; for *the day when the Son of Man*, the Meſſiah, *ſhould be revealed*, and *the ſeeing one of the days of the Son of Man*, were the very objects of their moſt ardent wiſhes, and what led them to put the queſtion to Jeſus *when the kingdom of God ſhould come?*

Theſe expreſſions however, it muſt be obſerved, though ſynonymous in their general ſignification, muſt be underſtood differently, according to the different views which were entertained of *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*. In the ſenſe in which the Jews underſtood *his coming*, our Lord tells them, v. 20, that *the kingdom of God ſhould not come with obſervation*; probably meaning by that expreſſion, that it ſhould not come with marks of worldly ſplendor

and

and glory, which would portend great national proſperity, and that they ſhould *deſire to ſee one of* ſuch *days of the Son of Man, but ſhould not ſee it.* Upon the contrary, he connects his coming with *their deſtruction*, as is abundantly evident, from the compariſons which he makes uſe of in both the chapters. Luke xvii. 26. *As it was in the days of Noah, ſo ſhall it be alſo in the days of the Son of Man.* Matt. xxiv. 37. *As the days of Noah were, ſo ſhall alſo the coming of the Son of Man be.* The other compariſon in St. Luke is peculiar to him, but preciſely to the ſame purpoſe with the former. v. 28. *Likewiſe alſo as it was in the days of Lot*, &c. *Even thus ſhall it be in the day when the Son of Man*, the Meſſiah, *is revealed.*

Here the judicious reader is requeſted particularly to obſerve, that St. Luke, in mentioning the ſtate of things in the time of Noah, ſays, *So ſhall it be in the days of the Son of Man.* But, in mentioning that of Lot, he ſays, *Even thus ſhall it be when the Son of is revealed.* What better evidence can poſſibly be deſired to ſhew that theſe different forms of expreſſion are ſynonymous, and that they plainly intimate that *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem* would fully reveal to them what

what they were ſo loth to own, namely, that they had totally miſtaken the true nature of the Meſſiah's character. This ſeems evidently to be what our Lord meant by his declaration in the twenty-fourth verſe, particularly as it is connected with the preceding verſes; *for as the lightning that lightneth out of the one part under heaven, ſhineth unto the other part under heaven—ſo ſhall alſo the Son of Man be in his day.* The like aſſertion, in the ſame connection, is obſervable in the twenty-fourth of Matthew, v. 27. *For as the lightning cometh out of the eaſt, and ſhineth even unto the weſt—ſo ſhall alſo the coming of the Son of Man be.*

The judicious Reader will be pleaſed to obſerve farther from this compariſon, that in the ſeventeenth chapter of Luke, the Hiſtorian applies the caſes of Noah and of Lot, as reſembling that of the Jews, in our Saviour's time, in point of ſuddenneſs and careleſs ſecurity, notwithſtanding the near approach of ſuch dreadful calamities. Now, it is particularly worthy of remark, that in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, the Hiſtorian introduces the example of Noah, in immediate and cloſe connection with our Lord's declaration in the thirty-

ſixth

ſixth verſe—*Of that day and hour knoweth no man.* v. 37. *But, as the days of Noah were, ſo ſhall alſo the coming of the Son of Man be.* What better evidence can poſſibly be wiſhed for, even if there was no other, that *the day and hour* there mentioned, has a direct and excluſive relation to the things which were to happen in that generation? But when to this it is added, that the whole connection neceſſarily requires it to be ſo applied, and that to apply it to any other diſtant event, would be to violate all the rules of language and of ſound reaſoning, it may fairly be concluded, that this, and this only, can be the true meaning of that much controverted paſſage; for as the learned Univerſity Preacher has very juſtly obſerved, "To ſuppoſe that, "at the thirty-ſixth verſe, the day of judg-"ment is introduced as a period diſtinct "and diſtant from the ſubverſion of the "Jewiſh polity, is to ſuppoſe either that our "Saviour propheſied, or that the Evangeliſt "wrote, without any regard to propriety or "connection." See Dr. Edward's Sermon, p. 23.*

From

* After having compoſed what has been here advanced upon the thirty-ſixth and following verſes, and turned to Biſhop Newcombe's notes on his Harmony of the Goſpels, it

From this extenſive view of the meaning of the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, and the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke, in conjunction with the ſeventeenth chapter of the laſt of theſe Evangeliſts, the judicious Reader, it may be preſumed, will form a tolerably accurate judgment of the aſſertion of Mr. Kett, that the enquiry of the Diſciples reſpected *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, the ſecond coming of our Lord*, and *the end of the world*, and that they were events which they poſſibly expected were to happen together, and to which the reply of our Lord evidently refers! He will ſee how injurious the inference of Mr. Houghton, from the ſeventeenth of Luke,

it afforded the moſt lively ſatisfaction to find his view of the ſubject in perfect harmony with that which is here preſented to the Reader. § 118, 119. "There can," ſays he, "be no doubt but that Luke, ch. xvii. 22-37, refers to the "deſtruction of Jeruſalem. Obſerve v. 31, 34, 35, 36, 37: "and compare v. 31 with Matt. 17, 18, and with Mark xiii. "15, 16. Therefore Matt. xxiv. 37-41, which is parallel "throughout to this paſſage of St. Luke, refers likewiſe to "that event. Afterwards St. Matthew continues the ſame "ſubject, as appears from comparing ch. xxiv. 42: ch. xxv. "1, 13, 14." It is ſingularly agreeable to have the ſuffrage of ſo excellent a judge, upon this highly controverted ſubject, as Biſhop Newcome! Indeed it is difficult to imagine how the evidence of the true meaning of theſe paſſages, here given, can be controverted! And thus, as Biſhop Newcome has obſerved, "all the accounts of the deſtruction of the Jews by the Romans, harmonize exactly."

quoted p. 200. to the intereſts of Chriſtianity, muſt neceſſarily be—" that the Evangeliſts " ſpoke of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and " of the end of the world, promiſcuouſly, " and conſequently that they conſidered " theſe two periods as one and the ſame."*

It ſeems proper to obſerve, before this part of the ſubject is cloſed, that in pointing out the inconſiſtencies and inconcluſive reaſonings of the ſeveral Writers who have paſt in review in examining the true meaning of the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, and the parallel chapters of Mark and Luke, not the moſt diſtant idea of giving offence to any of them has been entertained; but purely a deſire of doing juſtice to the ſacred Writers. The ſentiments which have been here adopted, as containing the true ſenſe of ſcripture, are open to a like freedom of enquiry, and if they will not ſtand that teſt, they are not worth contending for. In a firm belief that the view which has here been given of theſe chapters will ſtand that teſt, all that is requeſted from thoſe who may think differently is, not to be treated with leſs liberality than they have themſelves experienced!

* See Houghton's Sermons, p. 225.

From

From the very long and critical examination of the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, in conjunction with the parallel chapters in the other Evangeliſts, which hath, with the ſtricteſt regard to the connection, been preſented to the Reader, there ſeems to be the ſtrongeſt reaſon for believing that they all relate ſolely to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, which our Lord, with the utmoſt propriety, connected with *the coming of his kingdom*, as that event would, to all ſucceeding ages, be an authentic evidence, that the Jews had totally miſtaken *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*.

It will probably afford peculiar ſatisfaction to the judicious and attentive Reader, to be able, with preciſion, to trace the connection between this and the following chapter, and to aſcertain the deſign of the parables which are contained in it. This ſeems to be neceſſary, to correct a material defect in a former work, entitled *An Illuſtration of various Paſſages of Scripture*;* for to ſay the truth, the importance of that connection was not then ſufficiently perceived, and of courſe was not conſidered

* Publiſhed in the year 1789, by the Author of this Work.

as entering into the plan of the work. It now, however, appears in a very different light, and it is with peculiar ſatisfaction that the following view of its meaning is here preſented to the Reader.

The learned Univerſity Preacher has very properly obſerved, that " the beginning of " the twenty-fifth chapter is cloſely united " with the former, by the particle THEN, " and that the fourteenth verſe is firmly " united with the beginning, by the particle " FOR." He adds—" and ſhould the moſt " ſubtle and inventive genius endeavour to " accommodate the remaining portion to " any other event than the great day of re- " tribution, he will ſoon perceive the raſh- " neſs of his undertaking." pp. 24-5.

It is by no means intended to controvert any thing that the learned Univerſity Preacher has here ſaid. On the contrary, it will be found, upon examination, that the connection between the two chapters is abundantly evident, not only from the uſe of the particle THEN, in the beginning of the chapter, but from the nature and deſign of the parable of the ten virgins, which was to urge the neceſſity of that *watchfulneſs* which had ſo earneſtly been inculcated

in

in the preceding chapter. No other proof of this can be neceſſary, than the language which is uſed in both the chapters; for in the twenty-fourth chapter, the concluſion from the thoughtleſs ſecurity of the Jews in the time of Noah, as applied to thoſe who lived in the time of our Saviour, is thus expreſſed in the forty-ſecond verſe. *Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.* And the neceſſity of this *watchfulneſs* is illuſtrated in the ſtile of parable, from thence to the cloſe of the chapter. In the following chapter, the duty of *watchfulneſs* is farther illuſtrated in the parable of the ten virgins, whoſe duty is repreſented to have been, to be in a conſtant ſtate of *watchfulneſs*, for the coming of the bridegroom. And, in the concluſion of the parable, the application is made to the ſubject of the preceding chapter, almoſt in the very words which had been uſed in the forty-ſecond verſe. v. 13. *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.*

It being clear from hence that *the watchfulneſs* inculcated in the preceding chapter, is farther urged in the twenty-fifth chapter, the queſtion is, for what they were to watch?

To aſcertain this with preciſion, the Reader is again requeſted to recollect, that the enquiry of the Diſciples was—*What ſhall be the ſign of thy coming*, that is, of *the coming of the Meſſiah*, or of *the kingdom of God*. This is demonſtrably the meaning of their queſtion, from our Lord's anſwer—*When ye ſee all theſe things come to paſs, know ye that* THE KINGDOM OF GOD *is nigh at hand.*

This approach of *the kingdom of God*, he here manifeſtly connects with *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, the ſigns of which he had, in the courſe of his anſwer, fully pointed out, in order that they might be able to diſcern when it ſhould take place. But, in the thirty-ſixth verſe, he tells them *expreſsly*, in order that they might be in a conſtant ſtate of *watchfulneſs* for it—*Of that day and hour knoweth no man.* When therefore, the Evangeliſt ſays, in the firſt verſe of the twenty-fifth chapter, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN *is like unto ten virgins*, the meaning moſt evidently is, the *coming of the kingdom of heaven* is like *the coming of the bridegroom*, for whom the ten virgins were to be in a conſtant ſtate of *watchfulneſs*, to be ready to receive him.

The judicious Reader is requeſted here particularly to obſerve, that when the Diſciples

ples were, in the preceding chapter, directed *to watch*, it was in theſe words. v. 44. *Therefore be ye alſo ready, for in ſuch an hour as ye think not*, THE SON OF MAN *cometh*; but here the Evangeliſt changes the form of the expreſſion, and inſtead of ſaying *the coming of the Son of Man*, he ſays, *the kingdom of heaven* is like unto ten virgins. But that the meaning of the phraſe *the kingdom of heaven* might not be miſunderſtood, and that it might be rendered perfectly clear, that the expreſſions—*the Son of Man* and *the kingdom of heaven*, were preciſely of the ſame ſignification, the Evangeliſt again changes the form of the expreſſion, and, inſtead of ſaying, as he had done in the firſt verſe, *the kingdom of heaven*, he has again recourſe to the uſe of that phraſe which he had ſo often repeated in the courſe of the Hiſtory, and particularly in the preceding chapter, v. 13. *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein* THE SON OF MAN *cometh*.

If theſe remarks are juſt, there will be little difficulty in aſcertaining the meaning of the fourteenth verſe, which the learned Univerſity Preacher has obſerved, is ſo firmly connected with the beginning by the particle FOR; for as the Diſciples, in the

preceding parable, as well as in the close of the preceding chapter, were directed *to watch for the kingdom of heaven*, or for *the coming of the Son of Man*, an additional motive for *watchfulness* for *this kingdom* is assigned, in the beginning of the next parable; *for he*, viz. THE SON OF MAN, *is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods: And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one—to every man according to his several ability, and immediately took his journey.*

When it is considered that the whole of the long discourse in the twenty-fourth chapter, was delivered only four days before our Lord's crucifixion, in consequence of the enquiry of his Disciples about *the coming of the Messiah's kingdom*, that he assured them it would come *in that generation*—that he connected *that coming* with *the destruction of Jerusalem*, or with *the dissolution of the Mosaic oeconomy*—and particularly that he directed them to be in a constant state of *watchfulness* for its *coming*—when all these things are fully and impartially considered, it will perhaps appear by no means improbable, or unnatural, to suppose that our Lord here directed his Disciples to attend

tend to the importance of *their new ſituation* in a moral and ſpiritual view, rather than to thoſe temporal and worldly objects which they had ſo conſtantly connected with *the coming of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, and which, beyond all doubt, at this very time, engroſſed their thoughts.

The judicious and intelligent Reader is requeſted particularly to obſerve, that the reſemblance of our Lord to the man travelling into a far country, is particularly ſtriking, in theſe three reſpects—firſt, *in his aſcenſion into heaven*; for there doth not appear to have been any part of his Hiſtory to which *his travelling into a far country* is at all applicable, but that; and if that is the only one in which this reſemblance can be traced, it will be a ſtrong preſumption that it is the true one. Secondly, *in his return after a long abſence*, or at ſome far diſtant period, viz. *from heaven*, agreeably to the declaration of the angels at his aſcenſion, Acts ii. 11. *This ſame Jeſus who is taken up from you into heaven, ſhall ſo come in like manner as ye have ſeen him go into heaven.* And thirdly, in his reckoning with *his ſervants*, as the traveller with whom he is compared in the parable had done with *his own ſervants*;

or,

or, in other words, in his calling *all men* to an account for their conduct during his abſence.

Upon all theſe accounts the analogy between our Lord and the traveller appears to be moſt ſtriking, and the parable ſeems to have been admirably fitted to the great purpoſe which Jeſus appears to have had, all along, more immediately in his view, namely, to correct, in the moſt gradual and gentle manner, the prejudices of his Diſciples concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, to unfold to them the various events which were to happen to himſelf, as they were able to bear them, and in this manner to draw their attention to his coming, not as they had imagined, as the founder of *a worldly and temporal kingdom*, but of *a kingdom of righteouſneſs*, a moral and religious ſyſtem, the advantages of which they would hereafter be accountable for, during his abſence.

The firſt part of the parable appears to repreſent the conduct of the traveller with reſpect to *his own ſervants*, to whom he diſtributed different talents—to one five, to another two, and to another one, according to their ſeveral abilities. And having thus

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ſettled his domeſtic concerns, and given them a ſtrict injunction, like a wiſe and prudent maſter, to improve their ſeveral talents, or, as the Evangeliſt expreſſes it, to occupy, till he returned, he ſtraightway took his journey.

When the traveller, after a long abſence, had fulfilled the purpoſes of his journey, he, on his return, called together his ſervants, to know how they had improved the talents committed to their truſt! The reſult of the enquiry was, that he who had received five talents, had gained other five—he who had received two, gained two more—but he that had received only one, had neglected to improve his talent; in conſequence of which, the two former were rewarded according to their reſpective improvements, while the ſlothful ſervant was doomed to puniſhment for his neglect.

Such was the reckoning, and its conſequences, of the traveller with *his ſervants*, which, it muſt be obſerved, appears to have turned wholly upon the principles of worldly intereſt, not, however, without a ſtrict regard to the rules of juſtice and equity!

To the traveller's reckoning with *his ſervants* is contraſted that which our Lord

is

is ſuppoſed to take with *his ſervants*, which is repreſented as being conducted upon very different principles; the enquiry evidently turning upon improvements of a very different nature. To underſtand this part of the parable, the obſervation already made muſt be repeated, that, in the thirteenth verſe, the parable of the ten virgins concludes with a direction *to watch* for *the coming of the Son of Man*, or of *the kingdom of heaven*, by which is evidently meant *the coming of the kingdom of the Meſſiah*. *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh*. The reaſon for this *watchfulneſs* is aſſigned in the verſe immediately following; *for* He, *the Son of Man*, is *as a man travelling into a far country*. The particle FOR, therefore, in the beginning of the parable, in connection with the declaration that THE SON OF MAN is *as a man travelling into a far country*, ſeems evidently to ſhew, that this kingdom for which they were directed *to watch*, was to be the ſcene for their improvement, and that their conduct in it, during the abſence of their Lord, would be the ſubject of a future reckoning, which would determine their final condition, either of reward or puniſh-

puniſhment. v. 31. *When the Son of Man ſhall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then ſhall he ſit on the throne of his glory, and before him ſhall be gathered all nations, &c.*

Such is the outline which is here offered to the Reader's attention, of the grand object of the parable of the traveller, from the thirteenth to the thirty-firſt verſe, and of its application from thence to the cloſe of the chapter; which, in this view, appears to conſtitute, not *two parables*, as has generally been ſuppoſed, but *only one*. It is his province to give it a fair and impartial conſideration, and to examine whether it will ſtand the teſt of ſound criticiſm. The interpretation originated in a cloſe attention to the chapter itſelf, in connection with that which *immediately* precedes it, without any regard to the opinions which have hitherto been prevalent upon the ſubject, and, at the ſame time, without the ſmalleſt deſire or affectation of ſingularity. If it is deſerving of any attention, it is principally on account of its ſimplicity, and its quadrating with that gentle and eaſy manner of communicating divine truth, which ſo remarkably diſtinguiſhed our Lord's diſcourſes from thoſe of all other men:

men: And it ſeems to have been peculiarly well timed, after he had, in ſo full a manner, anſwered the queſtions of the Diſciples, reſpecting *the coming of the Meſſiah*, which they were *then* ſo anxiouſly expecting, and after he had ſo particularly pointed out the ſigns of its approach; for which they were ſo repeatedly directed *to watch!*

It is one advantage of this interpretation, that it ſeems effectually to obviate an objection of Mr. Evanſon, in his Diſſonance of the Goſpels, againſt this parable of the talents, which he terms "a very awkward "and faulty imitation of the parable of "the pounds," in the nineteenth chapter of St. Luke. "In the latter," ſays he, "our "Saviour is repreſented as diſtributing the "advantages of light and knowledge diſ-"played in his Goſpel, in the ſame equal "proportion, to all his followers, of every "rank and degree, as is ſtrictly the caſe, "becauſe his precepts and religious in-"ſtructions are equally intelligible to all: "but ſince the natural powers and abilities "of men are very different, his ſervants are "deſcribed as making different degrees of "improvement of thoſe equal advantages, "except one, who correſponding to thoſe

"per-

" perſons who having been inſtructed in " the religion of Jeſus Chriſt, reject it as " the unwarranted impoſture of an artful " and unjuſt man, refuſed to make any uſe " of them at all. The pretended Matthew, " on the contrary, makes him diſtribute " his talents in the moſt partial, unequal " manner; one only to one of his followers, " twice as many to another, and five times " as many to a third, as he himſelf expreſſes " it, *to every man according to his abilities*, as if " the religious inſtruction of the Goſpel, " ſo peculiarly preached to the pooreſt and " moſt illiterate, was not equally intelligible " to men of all capacities and degrees."*

But, if the view which has here been given of the parable of the traveller, from the thirteenth to the thirty-firſt verſe, be juſt, Mr. Evanſon has totally miſtaken its meaning; for it appears to relate *only* to the conduct of the traveller towards *his own ſervants*, by way of contraſt, as well as reſemblance, to that which our Lord had obſerved to *his ſervants*. No ſolid objection therefore can be made to the traveller's having diſtributed talents to his ſervants in proportion to the abilities which they were

* See Evanſon's Diſſonance, p. 179.

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ſuppoſed to poſſeſs; for this is the common practice of mankind, and that upon principles of the moſt perfect equity and juſtice. If, indeed, in calling his ſervants to an account, the traveller had demanded as much from the man to whom he had given two talents, as from the man to whom he had given five, there would have been juſt ground for cenſure of ſuch a repreſentation; but this, moſt evidently, is not the caſe: Upon the contrary, the traveller is repreſented as equally ſatisfied with him who had gained *two talents*, as with him who had gained *five*, though their rewards, as in all human affairs is always the caſe, were unequal; and as diſſatisfied with him who had received but *one talent*, only becauſe he had neglected to improve *that one*. If this repreſentation had been made, even of the ſupreme Lord of the univerſe, which however does not appear to have been the caſe, it would have been difficult to have found fault with it; for that he doth diſtribute talents to mankind in *unequal proportions*, no one, it may be preſumed, can entertain a doubt.

It is true indeed there is ſome difference between the two repreſentations, as ſtated by

by the two Evangeliſts; but it is evident, on the ſlighteſt inſpection, that they were delivered upon quite different occaſions, and why our Lord ſhould have been tied down to one exact mode of repreſentation, it would perhaps puzzle even Mr. Evanſon to aſſign a reaſon for! There ſeems, however, to be ſome room for ſuſpicion, that even *this parable* of the pounds, in the nineteenth of Luke, has not been rightly underſtood, when he aſſerts that our Saviour is repreſented as diſtributing the advantages of light and knowledge, diſplayed in his Goſpel, to all his followers, of every rank and degree, in equal proportions.

It may not perhaps be unacceptable to the Reader, to ſtate the particular occaſion upon which it was delivered, and to endeavor to diſcover the principal deſign of the parable of the pounds. Upon the converſion of Zaccheus, the Hiſtorian repreſents Jeſus as repairing to his houſe, which gave great offence to the Jews; *for when they ſaw* this, *they all murmured, ſaying that he was gone to be a gueſt with a man that was a ſinner.* Then follows the noble reſolution of Zaccheus, which at once evinced the ſincerity of his repentance, and his ſorrow

for his paſt miſconduct, as well as his determination to regulate his future life by the principles of integrity and benevolence. v. 8. *And Zaccheus ſtood and ſaid unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken any thing from any man by falſe accuſation, I reſtore him fourfold.* This declaration on the part of Zaccheus, produced another on that of Jeſus, containing a moſt comfortable aſſurance of his acceptance, and an aſſertion that it was the great deſign of his miſſion to aſſure pardon to ſuch as were of Zaccheus's deſcription! v. 9, 10. *And Jeſus ſaid unto him, This day is ſalvation come to this houſe, foraſmuch as he alſo is a ſon of Abraham; for the Son of Man is come to ſeek and to ſave that which is loſt.* The Evangeliſt then adds, that *as they, i. e.* thoſe who had murmured at his becoming Zaccheus's gueſt, *heard theſe things, he added and ſpake a parable,* BECAUSE HE WAS NIGH TO JERUSALEM, *and* BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD SHOULD IMMEDIATELY APPEAR.

There ſeems to be good reaſon, from this view of the occaſion of the parable, and particularly of the reaſons aſſigned for its being delivered, for thinking that the unbe-

believing Jews were the perſons for whom it was principally intended. The firſt reaſon here aſſigned for the delivery of the parable was, that *he was nigh to Jeruſalem.* This ſeems to be very emphatically explained in the fourteenth verſe; for having diſtributed his property among them, with a recommendation to improve it, tis ſaid *his citizens hated him, and ſent a meſſage after him, ſaying, We will not have this man to reign over us*; and ſuch preciſely was the conduct of *the citizens of Jeruſalem*, to which place he was then going! The other reaſon aſſigned for the delivery of the parable is, that they, *i. e.* THE JEWS, thought *the kingdom of God*, or of THE MESSIAH, *ſhould immediately appear.* This ſeems to be what the parable has a principal reference to; for a peculiar ſtreſs is evidently laid upon the caſe of the man who had kept his pound laid up in a napkin, as more eſpecially applicable to the Jewiſh nation, who had miſerably neglected the advantages which they had enjoyed under the Moſaic diſpenſation. The conſequences of this neglect are ſtrongly marked in the parable, in the ſentence which the nobleman paſſed upon the perſon who had not

improved his pound. v. 24. *Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they ſaid unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I ſay unto you, that unto every one that hath ſhall be given, and from him that hath not, even that he hath ſhall be taken away from him.* Then follows the application of the parable to the particular caſe of *the Jews*, to which he had eſpecially referred, in the beginning of the parable. *But thoſe mine enemies, who would not that I ſhould reign over them, bring hither and ſlay them before me.* How emphatically does this apply to the Jewiſh nation, and how ſtrongly does it mark the propriety of the remark of the Hiſtorian, that he ſpake the parable *becauſe he was nigh to Jeruſalem*; for in the forty-firſt verſe it is expreſsly ſaid, that *when he was come near, he beheld the city and wept over it, ſaying, If thou hadſt known, even thou, at leaſt, in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days ſhall come upon thee, that thine enemies ſhall caſt a trench about thee, and compaſs thee round, and keep thee in on every ſide, and ſhall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee, and they ſhall not leave in*

thee

*thee one ſtone upon another, becauſe thou knoweſt not the time of thy viſitation!**

With reſpect to the general turn of the two parables, it evidently appears that *different talents* are admitted by them both. In the one caſe, the lord is repreſented as forming *his own judgment* of the reſpective talents of his ſervants, and as diſtributing his property to them in ſuch proportions as *thoſe talents* required. In the other caſe, *equal portions* of the nobleman's wealth are diſtributed, and the difference of their talents is left to be aſcertained *only* by *their reſpective improvements!* He muſt be a very faſtidious Critic indeed, who will find fault with either of theſe repreſentations on account of theſe differences; and a very haſty one, who will aſſert that the one is a faulty and awkward imitation of the other!

From the examination of the two very important and intereſting chapters, viz. the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth of St. Matthew, the Reader's attention is very naturally

* The Reader will not conſider this as a full illuſtration of the meaning of the parable of the pounds; but enough ſeems to have been ſaid to prove that Mr. E. has miſtaken the deſign of it, as well as of that of the talents. If he refers again to Mr. Evanſon's obſervations upon them, he will perhaps form a better judgment whether they are well founded!

directed to the concluding ſcene of our Lord's life, when he was arraigned before the Jewiſh High Prieſt, as *an Impoſtor* who had aſſumed the great and important character of *the Meſſiah*, without poſſeſſing any of thoſe characteriſtic marks of *the Meſſiah-ſhip* which they had affixed to it. On the contrary, his then degraded and humble ſituation could not poſſibly, in the eyes of *the Jewiſh Rulers*, bear the moſt diſtant reſemblance to the character of *the Meſſiah*; for, as has been often obſerved in the courſe of this work, they conſtantly expected that he would reſcue them from the galling yoke which they were then under to the Romans, and render them the victorious conquerors of the world!

When the witneſſes who appeared againſt him, upon this truly awful and ſolemn occaſion, had delivered their evidence, ſuch as it was, the High Prieſt, addreſſing our Lord, aſked him what he had to ſay in his defence, Matt. xxvi. 62. *Anſwereſt thou nothing! What is it which theſe witneſs againſt thee? But Jeſus*, according to the expreſſive language of the Evangeliſt, *held his peace*, and nothing, as it ſhould ſeem, could prevail upon him to break ſilence, but the

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ſolemn adjuration of the High Prieſt. *And the High Prieſt anſwered and ſaid unto him, I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah, *the Son of the living God.* To this adjuration our Lord, with great and becoming dignity, replied—*thou haſt ſaid*; or, as it is in Mark, ch. xiv. 62. *I am, i. e.* I am *the Chriſt*, or *the Meſſiah*; to which he immediately added, *Nevertheleſs I ſay unto you, Hereafter ſhall ye ſee the Son of Man ſitting on the right hand of power*; or, as it is in Luke, *of the power of God, and coming*, not as you vainly imagine, with worldly pomp and ſplendor, to indulge your aſpiring and ambitious views, but, *in the clouds of heaven!* As if he had ſaid—The calamities which I have foretold, under the expreſſion of *coming in the clouds*, will ſoon begin to take place, which will fully manifeſt how much you have miſtaken the *true nature of the Meſſiah's character!* St. Luke ſays, that this declaration on the part of Jeſus, produced another queſtion from the Jewiſh Rulers, which is not noticed by St. Matthew, nor by St. Mark. Luke xxii. 70. *Art thou then the Son of God, i. e.* Art thou *the Meſſiah*, plainly intimating in what ſenſe they underſtood his aſſertion, that they

ſhould *ſee him coming in the clouds of heaven, and ſitting on the right hand*, or cloathed with the power, *of God.*

This anſwer of our Lord to the queſtions of the Jewiſh Rulers, the judicious Reader is requeſted particularly to obſerve, is exactly the ſame with that language which he had before made uſe of, in the thirtieth verſe of the twenty-fourth chapter of this Evangeliſt. *They ſhall ſee the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.* In examining the meaning of that paſſage, it was obſerved that this language was borrowed from the Prophet Daniel, when confeſſedly deſcribing *the coming of the Meſſiah*, and that the conſtant ſignification of the phraſe *coming in clouds*, was the execution of judgments. But whatever obſcurity may have been ſuppoſed to exiſt in this paſſage of the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, in conſequence of its connection, either with the preceding or ſubſequent context, that obſcurity cannot, in the preſent inſtance, poſſibly exiſt; for no one can entertain a doubt, that the ſubject of the enquiry of the Jewiſh Rulers related to *the coming of the Meſſiah*, or whether Jeſus ſuſtained that character, as he

he moſt evidently was arraigned for aſſuming it *falſely!* If therefore there is any connection between the queſtion of the High Prieſt, and the reply which our Lord made to it—if a perſon's meaning can be collected from the ſituation and circumſtances of things at the time when he ſpoke theſe words, the meaning of Jeſus could not poſſibly be any other than this—that though he was now in the hands of his enemies, degraded, contemned, and reviled as a notorious Malefactor and Impoſtor, for aſſuming *the character of the Meſſiah*; yet that the claim which he had made to it was juſtly founded, and as a proof that it was ſo, and that they had totally miſtaken its true nature, they ſhould ſoon ſee the power of the Almighty exerted in a moſt remarkable manner. They ſhould ſee *the Son of Man*, the Meſſiah, *coming*, not in the manner in which they had expected him *to come*, but *in the clouds of heaven*; and the vengeance which they had falſely imagined was to be inflicted *upon their enemies*, would be executed *upon themſelves!* Such a declaration as this, muſt have been a very ſevere and cutting one to them! It was as if he had ſaid—You have been looking and longing, with the utmoſt

utmoſt impatience, for a perſon under *the character of your Meſſiah*, who ſhould raiſe you to the higheſt diſtinction and pre-eminence among the nations of the earth, and to render you proſperous and ſucceſsful beyond the example of all former times—you expect all the ſenſual gratifications which power or wealth can beſtow—but theſe expectations will moſt aſſuredly be fruſtrated; for though I, who have now, in expreſs terms, aſſerted my claim to *the character of the Meſſiah*, am the object of your utter contempt and deriſion—though I am, as one of your own Prophets foretold of me, *deſpiſed and rejected* by you—*a man of ſorrows and acquainted with grief*—though, in ſhort, you ſee none of the characteriſtic marks of *the Meſſiahſhip* about me—yet you ſhall ſoon ſee how much you have been deceived; *you ſhall ſee the Son of Man*, the Meſſiah, *ſitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

The effect which this declaration of our Lord had upon the Jewiſh Rulers, is an unequivocal proof in what ſenſe they underſtood it; for, as was natural to be expected, their reſentment was inſtantaneous, and their rage againſt him was immediately excited

excited to the higheſt pitch of fury. *Then*, ſays the Evangeliſt, Matt. xxvi. 65. *the High Prieſt rent his clothes, ſaying, He hath ſpoken blaſphemy, what farther need have we of witneſſes* of his being an Impoſtor? *Behold now ye have heard his blaſphemy! what think ye? They anſwered, He is guilty, i. e.* of a crime that by the Jewiſh law is deſerving *of death. Then did they ſpit in his face, and buffetted him, and others ſmote him with the palms of their hands, ſaying, Propheſy to us thou Chriſt,* thou that pretendeſt to be THE MESSIAH, *who is he that ſmote thee?* What greater proofs of rage and indignation could they poſſibly diſcover, or how, in a ſtronger and more forcible manner, expreſs the extreme grief which the very idea of the diſappointment of their worldly views produced upon their minds? No wonder that, in ſuch circumſtances, they ſhould purſue him with the moſt unrelenting malice, and that nothing could poſſibly ſatiate it but his blood. *It is not fit that he ſhould live! Away with him—Crucify him, crucify him, was the univerſal cry. Not this man but Barabbas!* No crime, in their eſtimation, could equal that which deprived them of hopes and proſpects ſo dear to their hearts, and ſo flatter-

flattering to their pride, and which preſented to their view nothing but ſcenes of horror and deſolation—of miſery and ruin!

When the Jewiſh Rulers had accompliſhed their bloody purpoſe, by putting Jeſus to an ignominious and cruel death, they thought they had completely proved him to be *an Impoſtor*, and that they had, moſt effectually, deſtroyed his pretenſions to *the character of the Meſſiah*. Even his own Diſciples, the conſtant companions of his miniſtry, the very men who had received a commiſſion from him to announce the approach of *the Meſſiah's kingdom*, ſhewed, as was natural, in ſuch trying circumſtances, to be expected, no ſmall anxiety at a fate ſo diſaſtrous, and, as they ſeem to have imagined, ſo fatal to their hopes. *We truſted*, ſaid they, *that it had been he who ſhould have redeemed Iſrael*, who ſhould have reſcued us from our preſent degraded ſituation under the yoke of the Romans, and have raiſed us as a nation to the higheſt ſtate of worldly proſperity!

In the midſt of ſuch diſtreſſing apprehenſions, one only hope now remained, and that, as they ſeem to have imagined, almoſt A FORLORN HOPE. *Beſides all this, this is the third*

third day, the day in which he ſaid he ſhould riſe again. Nothing could more ſtrongly expreſs the extreme anxiety, and the painful ſolicitude of the Diſciples, with reſpect to the iſſue of an attachment which a few hours more was to produce, which was to decide the important, and, to them particularly, moſt intereſting queſtion—whether, in the perſon of Jeſus, they had been following *the true Meſſiah*, or *an Impoſtor!*

The triumph of the enemies of Jeſus was, however, but of ſhort duration, and the painful ſuſpenſe of the Diſciples ſoon ſubſided; for, as one of them boldly aſſerted before the Jewiſh Rulers themſelves, he whom they had crucified *did God raiſe from the dead*, and *by his reſurrection he was declared to be the Son of God*, the Meſſiah, *with power*. They now no longer doubted, they no longer could doubt, that he was *the Meſſiah!* But as they ſtill retained their original prejudices that *the Meſſiah's kingdom* was a temporal kingdom, hope very naturally revived in their minds, and the dying ſparks of ambition were rekindled in their boſoms, which preſently afterwards glowed with uncommon warmth, if not with a certain aſſurance, created by ſo aſtoniſh-

aſtoniſhing a diſplay of the divine power in his behalf, that he would now declare himſelf as *their Meſſiah*, and in ſuch a manner as would gratify their utmoſt ambition; for no ſooner were the firſt emotions of ſurprize and aſtoniſhment, at the wonderful event of his Reſurrection, ſubſided, than they immediately aſked him ſaying, though with the moſt reſpectful reverence—*Lord, wilt thou, at this time, reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael?*

They probably, at this moment, recollected that he had told them, upon his giving them a commiſſion to announce the approach of the Meſſiah's kingdom, that *they ſhould not have gone over the cities of Iſrael till the Son of Man*, THE MESSIAH, *came*; and afterwards, that *there were ſome* among his hearers *who ſhould not taſte of death till they ſaw the kingdom of God come with power*; and now that they ſaw ſuch a glorious diſplay of power *in his Reſurrection from the dead*, they imagined, and not without reaſon, judging, as they did, from their own prejudices, that the time was now come when he ſhould openly declare himſelf under the character of *the Meſſiah!*

The extraordinary diſplay of power *in the Reſurrection of Jeſus*, could not fail to make

make the deepeſt impreſſion on the minds of the Diſciples. It ſufficiently ſecured their belief in the integrity of his character, and their perſuaſion that he was *the Meſſiah*. Without therefore giving them the aſſurances of *his coming*, which the painful diſcoveries that from time to time he had to make to them rendered ſo peculiarly neceſſary, but which were now no longer ſo, his anſwer to them was as different as the circumſtances were different. He did not now, as heretofore, give them any aſſurances of his coming within any given period; but he told them—*It is not for you to know the times and the ſeaſons which the Father hath kept in his own power.*

This anſwer of our Lord appears to have been intended as an indirect reproof of their worldly mindedneſs, and is as if he had ſaid—Have I been ſo long with you, communicating diſcoveries ſo manifeſtly contrary to all your expectations?—Have both you and myſelf been the objects of the moſt malevolent perſecutions, which have ended in putting me to a violent death?—Have I told you, in the moſt direct and explicit terms, of the approaching deſolation of your country, and do you ſtill fondly

fondly cheriſh the liberation of it from the Roman yoke, and its reſtoration to the utmoſt degree of ſplendor and glory? What our Lord ſaid to thoſe who went with him to the village of Emmaus, ſeems to have been particularly applicable to the Diſciples upon this occaſion—*O fools and ſlow of heart, to believe all that the Prophets have ſpoken!* But in adminiſtering this indirect reproof of their worldly mindedneſs, our Lord does not loſe ſight of his uſual condeſcenſion to their prejudices; for it is particularly remarkable, that even at this late period, he does not hint that no ſuch kingdom as they expected ſhould be ſet up—he only tells them—*It is not for you to know the times and the ſeaſons!*

So deep rooted were the prejudices even of the Diſciples of Jeſus, concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, that nothing could entirely eradicate them while he continued upon earth. But *the Aſcenſion* of their Maſter into heaven in their preſence, and the ſubſequent effuſion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecoſt, rectified their errors, and removed that miſt from before their eyes which had ſo long hindered them from perceiving the true nature of his cha-

character. Thus the Hiſtorian relates that Peter, addreſſing his countrymen upon the latter occaſion, boldly declares Jeſus to be *the Chriſt*, or *the Meſſiah*, Acts ii. 36. *Therefore let all the houſe of Iſrael know aſſuredly, that God hath made that ſame Jeſus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Chriſt*, or *the Meſſiah*.* Again, ch. v. 30, 31. *The God of our fathers raiſed up Jeſus whom ye ſlew and hung on a tree: Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance unto Iſrael, and forgiveneſs of ſins. And, at the cloſe of the ſame chapter, it is ſaid, that daily in the temple, and in every houſe, they ceaſed not to teach and to preach Jeſus*, THE CHRIST, or *the Meſſiah*.

From this change of language upon the ſubject of *the coming of Chriſt*, or of *the Meſſiah*, it may be inferred, not only that

* The effect of this diſcourſe of Peter, of which this declaration was the concluſion, is thus deſcribed by the Hiſtorian, v. 37. *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and ſaid unto Peter and to the reſt of the Apoſtles—Men and brethren, what ſhall we do?* To which Peter replied, v. 38. *Repent, and be converted, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jeſus Chriſt, for the remiſſion of ſins, and ye ſhall receive the gift of the Holy Ghoſt; for the promiſe is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God ſhall call; and with many other words did he teſtify and exhort, ſaying, Save yourſelves from this untoward generation.*

the Diſciples had changed their ſentiments reſpecting *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*, but that *the Reſurrection of Jeſus* was ſo well authenticated, that it could not poſſibly be diſputed. It can hardly be ſuppoſed, when human nature is fairly conſidered, that the Jews could have borne ſuch repeated charges, with every mark of deteſtation and abhorrence of that infamous tranſaction, of their having crucified him, if they had any poſſible means of refuting it! If, on the other hand, it could for a moment be imagined that Jeſus ſtill remained under the dominion of death, what a hardineſs of front, if the expreſſion may be admitted, muſt the Diſciples have been endowed with, to have proclaimed, within a very few days of his death, and in the very city where he was crucified, that he was *riſen from the dead*, and that, not before a few, who might be ſuppoſed to be in their intereſt, but before the Jewiſh multitude—nay, before the Jewiſh Rulers themſelves? Let thoſe who are beſt converſant in the arts and artifices of mankind, produce an inſtance of effrontery like this, or a caſe which was ſo likely to overwhelm the authors with obloquy and diſgrace, upon the ſuppoſition that there

there was *no Reſurrection!* The Jewiſh Rulers, it is true, took offence at the boldneſs of theſe men, and endeavoured to put a ſtop to their progreſs; but they took no ſteps to invalidate their teſtimony, nor adopted any meaſures to cruſh *the riſing Religion*, but what involved them deeper in guilt, and fully evinced their conſciouſneſs that what they aſſerted was not to be confuted! The conduct of the Apoſtles, on the contrary, ſeems to have been the natural effect of integrity, and a conſciouſneſs of the truth of what they aſſerted; for when the Jewiſh Rulers had commanded them *not to ſpeak at all, nor preach in the name of Jeſus*, nothing could be more noble than the anſwer which they gave to this injunction—*Whether it be right in the ſight of God, to hearken to you more than to God, judge ye; for we cannot but ſpeak the things which we have ſeen and heard.*

It may be thought extraordinary, that men who had retained their prejudices concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom* throughout the whole of their Maſter's life—who had in vain been informed of events which were totally incompatible with

all their ideas upon the ſubject, ſhould, all of a ſudden, renounce thoſe prejudices, and appear to be convinced, not only that Jeſus was *the Meſſiah*, but that he had given ſufficient proofs that he was ſo! But, independent of the advantages which they gained from the deſcent of the Holy Spirit—their hopes of his coming, in the manner in which they expected him to come, were totally deſtroyed by *his Aſcenſion*, which probably awakened their attention to what he had taught them concerning his perſonal ſufferings, which they had juſt ſeen fully verified—to what he had foretold concerning *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*—and, above all, to that ſtupendous proof of the truth of his character, *his Reſurrection from the dead*. This great event very naturally induced them to believe that their utmoſt hopes were about to be realized; for after this they could no longer doubt, whatever difficulties might preſent themſelves to their minds, as to the accompliſhment of their favourite object, that he was *the Meſſiah*. But when Jeſus was removed from them, they felt, probably in a very ſtrong manner, the vanity of their expectations; yet they could not diſbelieve the integrity of his cha-

character, in whoſe behalf ſo ſignal an atteſtation had been given—they therefore, agreeable to the directions of their divine Maſter, tarried at Jeruſalem, *waiting for the promiſe of the Father*, and for thoſe inſtructions which that promiſe included, with a determination to regulate their conduct by thoſe inſtructions. To this they were ſtrongly encouraged by the parting words of their beloved Lord—*Ye ſhall receive power, after that the Holy Ghoſt is come upon you, and ye ſhall be witneſſes unto me both in Jeruſalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermoſt parts of the earth.*

The Reader hath now before him the great outline of the ſcripture doctrine of *the coming of Chriſt*, which hath been the occaſion of ſo much offence to Unbelievers, and of perplexity to Chriſtians, and to thoſe too of the moſt diſtinguiſhed eminence in the Chriſtian world. In the inveſtigation of this important ſubject, the cloſeſt attention has been given to *the connection and occaſion* of the ſeveral paſſages which have been examined, in which the ſame undeviating ſenſe has been moſt clearly and unequivocally eſtabliſhed, founded upon our Lord's original language, when he

began his miniſtry, that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*. This language, it has been demonſtrated, was thoroughly underſtood by every deſcription of people to whom it was addreſſed, to mean the approach of *that kingdom* which the antient Prophets, and particularly the Prophet Daniel, had foretold was about that time to be erected. And as it was the peculiar province of Jeſus, as *the Meſſiah*, to diſcloſe to them *the nature of that kingdom*, it has been obſerved, that in unfolding the principal events which were to take place in the courſe of his miniſtry, and which, in a greater or leſs degree, were to affect his Diſciples, himſelf, and his country, he conſtantly adhered to *the ſame language*, keeping always in view that of *the Prophet Daniel*, from which it was originally borrowed. Laſtly, it has been obſerved, that in informing them of theſe events, our Lord had a conſtant regard to the prejudices and prepoſſeſſions of his Diſciples, by communicating them in a gradual and gentle manner, as they were able to bear them, and as times and circumſtances permitted!

From this examination, various obſervations very naturally ariſe, which it will be of great importance particularly to attend to.

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The firſt obſervation to which the judicious and intelligent Reader, who has attended to what has been advanced upon this very intereſting and important ſubject, will immediately give his moſt cordial aſſent is, that the language which our Lord *ſo conſtantly* made uſe of with reſpect to *his coming*, was rendered abſolutely neceſſary by *the circumſtances of the times*, and particularly by *the prejudices which all deſcriptions of Jews* had imbibed concerning *the nature of the Meſſiah's kingdom*.

Had our Lord, for inſtance, told his Diſciples, when he gave them a commiſſion to announce the glad tidings of *the kingdom of God*, that it was *come*, or that he himſelf was *the Meſſiah*, they would, nay, they muſt, with the prejudices which they had about them concerning *the nature of his character*, have demanded what they conceived to be *the proper proofs of the Meſſiahſhip*; ſuch proofs as were not in the power of Jeſus to give, and ſuch, indeed, as were *in direct contradiction* to *its real nature*, and upon failing to give *thoſe proofs*, they muſt have deſerted him. Had he not, on the contrary, upon that occaſion, aſſured them that *they ſhould not have gone over the cities of Iſrael till*

the Son of Man came, they would have wanted that neceſſary ſupport and encouragement of their expectations, which could alone keep them faithful to him, till time ſhould give them juſter ideas of *the nature of his character!* Again: had not our Lord damped the ardor of his Diſciples, when they had acknowledged that they believed him to be *the Meſſiah*, by unfolding to them *the ſufferings and death* which awaited him from the hands of his countrymen; which were ſo totally incompatible with all their ideas of *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*, that they could not comprehend *what he meant*, they would, in all human probability, have then demanded, as they actually did *after* HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD, *when he would reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael.* But by informing them of theſe circumſtances, he ſo effectually repreſſed their ambition, that, at the cloſe of that diſcovery, he found it abſolutely neceſſary to aſſure them that, notwithſtanding all this, there were ſome of thoſe who were then preſent *who ſhould not taſte of death till they ſaw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.* Nay, in the lateſt period of his life, when he foretold *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, our Lord found it equally

equally neceſſary, both to guard them againſt *falſe Chriſts and falſe Prophets*, and likewiſe to give them the ſtrongeſt aſſurances of *his coming*, and *in that generation*. This was, in fact, the only alternative which the circumſtances of the times, and the prejudices of his countrymen, admitted; for no other method was left to him of gaining a hearing upon a ſubject, which ſo much engroſſed their thoughts, and about which they diſcovered ſo lively an anxiety. Beſides, it is not unworthy of notice, that our Lord was compelled to adopt this language, by the enquiries of the Jews about *the coming* of *the Meſſiah*, or of *the kingdom of God*. The inſtance recorded in the ſeventeenth of Luke, when the Phariſees aſked Jeſus *when the kingdom of God ſhould come*, is a very remarkable one; in which he told them that it would not come in the manner in which they expected it would come, viz. *with obſervation*, *i. e.* with external glory and ſplendor, as *a worldly kingdom*, but that, nevertheleſs, the time was coming, when *the Son of Man*, the Meſſiah, *would be revealed* —when *the nature of his kingdom* would be demonſtrated to be very different indeed from what they imagined!

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Unbelievers may ſee, or affect to ſee, a ſtriking impropriety in the uſe of this language of our Lord, and particularly in his connecting *his coming* with *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, and may think it neceſſary that a perſonal appearance, at that period, ſhould be clearly made out, in order to a thorough vindication of his character! But why is this neceſſary? It is evident, beyond all diſpute, that *the coming of the Meſſiah* was the grand object of expectation, on the part of the Jewiſh nation, and on that of Jeſus, to give them juſt notions of *its nature*; the latter aſſerting, in the plaineſt terms, the approach of *the kingdom of heaven*, by which every Jew underſtood him to mean *the coming of the kingdom of the Meſſiah*. To prove that he himſelf was *the Meſſiah*, he gave them the ſtrongeſt proofs that the laws of nature were completely at his command, *by healing the ſick* by his bare word, *by reſtoring limbs* to thoſe who wanted them, and *by* the greateſt exertion of power of which mankind have any conception, viz. the *reſtoring the dead to life:* Yet ſtill they refuſed to acknowledge Jeſus as *the Meſſiah*, until they ſhould ſee ſuch ſigns of his ſuſtaining that character as they had affixed

affixed to it, and nothing, it ſhould ſeem, could convince them of this their capital miſtake, but the utter ruin which he had predicted was coming upon them, and which, in their calamities, they afterwards ſaw fully verified. Now, ſays Jeſus, ye ſhall ſee in theſe calamities *the diſſolution*, inſtead of *the proſperity*, of your nation, and that conſequently you have totally miſtaken *the nature of the Meſſiah's character*. You ſhall ſee that the language of your own favourite Prophet Daniel, of *the coming of the Son of Man* IN CLOUDS, is not applicable, as you proudly imagine, *to your enemies*, but *to yourſelves*. This ſeems to have been all that he meant to aſſert, all, in fact, that he did aſſert, and all that the Jews could have ſuppoſed him to aſſert by the uſe of theſe expreſſions.

A ſecond obſervation, ariſing from the preceding view of the doctrine of the Evangeliſts, concerning *the coming of the Meſſiah* is, that it doth not depend upon any preference which may be given of one Hiſtorian to another; for they all uniformly agree in giving the ſame repreſentation of the ſubject, upon thoſe leading occaſions in which our Lord was more peculiarly called upon,

to

to give ſuch aſſurances of *his coming* as the diſcoveries which he had to make to them neceſſarily required! This is particularly remarkable in the caſe of the Diſciples of Jeſus acknowledging him to be *the Meſſiah*. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, the ſame train of reaſoning is adopted, and they all conclude with the ſame deciſive and unequivocal aſſurances of *the coming of the kingdom of God, i. e.* of *the Meſſiah*. In the caſe of our Lord's prediction of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, they all unite in ſtating that thoſe predictions originated in the enquiry of the Diſciples about *the coming of his kingdom*, and they all concur in the ſame aſſurances of *the coming of the Son of Man, i. e.* the Meſſiah, *in that generation*. In the other caſe, that, to wit, of our Lord's giving his Diſciples a commiſſion to announce the glad tidings of *the kingdom of heaven*, they all agree in ſtating the fact; but in St. Matthew, the directions of our Lord for the regulation of their conduct, and his foretelling the ill treatment which they ſhould meet with in the exerciſe of their function, are much more diffuſe; but nothing is to be found there, but what is extremely natural and proper to have been de-

delivered upon ſuch an occaſion, and it cannot be denied, that the aſſurance which he then thought fit to give them, was extremely well timed, that *they ſhould not have gone over the cities of Iſrael till the Son of Man came*. As was obſerved, in examining this part of the ſubject, ſuch an aſſurance was, upon that occaſion, particularly neceſſary, and it is highly probable, that if it had not been given, they would have forſaken him, notwithſtanding the high regard which they entertained for the peculiar excellence of his perſonal character. In ſhort, it carries upon the face of it every internal character of *genuine Hiſtory*, and every mark of authenticity.

There are ſome parts of this Hiſtory of St. Matthew which appear to have been found fault with, which, had they been conſidered with due attention, would have been found equally to confirm his credit as an Hiſtorian, as the chapter juſt mentioned. Of this kind are the ſermon upon the mount, and the twenty-fourth chapter; which laſt is, in the fulleſt manner, confirmed by the teſtimony of St. Luke, in the ſeventeenth chapter, where the ſame compariſons are made uſe of, and applied particularly

ticularly to the ſame occaſion, namely, to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*. Nor muſt it be forgotten, that the parable of the talents, which hath been called "an awkward and "faulty repreſentation of the parable of "the pounds," and, indeed, the whole of the twenty-fifth chapter, will ever do the higheſt credit, as well to the accuracy which is diſplayed in them, as to the judgment by which they appear to have been dictated!*

There are few men who can entertain a doubt that the Evangelical Hiſtories, in their paſſage through a long ſeries of ages, have ſuſtained ſome injury, which may have been the occaſion of corruptions, and of the uſe of ſome words which are known not to have belonged to the age when theſe Hiſtories were compoſed. But it ſeems infinitely more natural to charge theſe corruptions to the faults of Tranſcribers, than to reject the Hiſtories themſelves; eſpecially when, in the moſt important and eſſential reſpects, they mutually confirm and corro-

* It has been obſerved by Dr. Campbell, that all antiquity ſeems agreed in the opinion that Matthew was, of all the Goſpels, the firſt publiſhed, and he very properly adds—In a caſe of this kind, I ſhould not think it prudent, unleſs for very ſtrong reaſons, to diſſent from their verdict.

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borate each other's teſtimony, and when, by the teſtimony of one Evangeliſt, matters of the higheſt credibility are related, which are omitted by the reſt. With reſpect to thoſe faults or additions, if ſuch there ſhould be, in any of the Evangeliſts, it is the province of ſober criticiſm to aſcertain them with preciſion, and to correct them; for, as Dr. Kennicott has very juſtly obſerved, "What "was inſpired by God, was committed to "the care of men, and we muſt acknow- "ledge that *we have had this treaſure in* "*earthen veſſels*. We muſt acknowledge "that theſe ſacred books have not deſcended "to us, for ſo many ages, *without ſome* "*miſtakes and errors of the Tranſcribers*. This "the various readings remarked in the dif- "ferent copies, both of the Old and New "Teſtament, evidently demonſtrate." It is therefore the duty of all thoſe "who would "know and be eſtabliſhed in the truth," as the ſame learned Author goes on to obſerve, "who with the utmoſt veneration "receive the books of Scripture *as the word* "*of God*, are deſirous of learning, by every "rational method, what was *originally* re- "corded in them," to encourage ſuch diſ-

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quiſitions.* This ſeems to be the more neceſſary, as an a attack has been made upon the authenticity of three out of the four Evangeliſts; and as, amidſt all the abuſe with which it is mixed, there certainly are ſome obſervations which are worthy of the attention of the ſober and impartial Critic.

With reſpect to the variations which are to be found in the New Teſtament, it muſt be obſerved with Dr. Bentley, that "it is a "fact undeniable, that the ſacred books "have ſuffered no more alterations than "common and claſſic Authors, and have no "more variations than what muſt neceſſarily "have happened from the nature of things. "And it has been the common ſenſe of "men of letters, that numbers of manu-"ſcripts do not make a text precarious, but "are uſeful, nay neceſſary, to its eſtabliſh-"ment and certainty. The reſult then of "the whole matter is, that either all an-"tient books, as well as the ſacred, muſt "now be laid aſide, as uncertain and pre-"carious; or to ſay, that all the tranſcripts

* See Dr. Kennicott's Firſt Diſſertation on the State of the printed Hebrew Text of the Old Teſtament conſidered, pp. 7, 8, and 10.

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" of ſacred books ſhould have been pri-
" vileged againſt the common fate, and
" exempted from all ſlips and errors what-
" ever. There is, in each of theſe maxims,
" ſuch a guſt of the parodox and perverſe,
" that they equally ſuit with a modern
" Free-thinker's palate. I have too much
" value for the antient Claſſics, even to
" ſuppoſe that they are to be abandoned,
" becauſe their remains are ſufficiently pure
" and genuine to make us ſure of the
" Writer's deſign. If a corrupt line, or
" dubious reading, chances to intervene, it
" does not darken the whole context, nor
" make an Author's purpoſe precarious.
" Terence, for inſtance, has as many varia-
" tions as any book whatever, in proportion
" to its bulk; and yet, with all its inter-
" polations, omiſſions, additions, or gloſſes,
" (chuſe the worſt of them on purpoſe)
" you cannot deface the contrivance and
" plot of one play—no, not of one ſingle
" ſcene; but its ſenſe, deſign, and ſub-
" ſerviency, to the laſt iſſue and concluſion,
" ſhall be viſible and plain through all the
" miſt of various lections."*

This

* " Why," ſays the ſame learned Author, " muſt the
" ſacred books have been exempted from the injuries of

This laſt obſervation of the learned Author, appears to be particularly applicable to the ſubject of the preceding pages; for its ſenſe and deſign, and ſubſerviency to the laſt iſſue and concluſion, is viſible, amidſt all the difficulties and miſts with which it can be ſuppoſed to be encompaſſed. The outline of the doctrine, as ſtated at large in the preceding pages, cannot poſſibly be miſtaken, whether it is taken from St. Matthew, St. Mark, or St. Luke, and whether a preciſe and determinate meaning can be affixed to ſome particular paſſages or not.*

The truth of the ſcripture doctrine of *the coming of Chriſt*, or of *the Meſſiah*, therefore, doth not at all depend upon the queſtion of the authenticity of this, that, or the other Goſpel, or upon the perfect purity and freedom from error of any one of them!

" time, and ſecured from the leaſt change? What need of " that perpetual miracle, if, with all the preſent changes, " the whole Scripture is perfect, and ſufficient to all the " great ends and purpoſes of its firſt writing."

* It muſt be obſerved here, that one paſſage connected with the ſubject of this work, has been omitted on account of its difficulty, namely, that Matt. xxiii. where, after our Lord had been denouncing judgments againſt the Jewiſh nation, he ſays—*Ye ſhall not ſee me henceforth till ye ſhall ſay, Bleſſed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

It

It is quite ſufficient to the purpoſe of this enquiry, and indeed to the eſtabliſhment of *the truth of Chriſtianity*, that one of them be authentic. Moſt pertinent to this purpoſe are the remarks of Dr. Paley, in his View of the Evidences of Chriſtianity, which are here, with peculiar pleaſure, tranſcribed for the judicious and attentive Reader's deliberate peruſal.

"If," ſays he, "*any one* of the four "Goſpels be genuine, we have not only "direct hiſtorical teſtimony to the point "we contend for, but teſtimony which, ſo "far as that point is concerned, cannot "reaſonably be rejected. If the firſt Goſpel "was really written by Matthew, we have "the narrative of one of the number, from "which to judge what were the miracles "and the kind of miracles which the "Apoſtles attributed to Jeſus. Although, "for argument's ſake, and only for argu-"ments ſake, we ſhould allow that this "Goſpel had been erroneouſly aſcribed to "Matthew, yet, if the Goſpel of St. John* "be genuine, the obſervation holds with "no

* To thoſe who are at all acquainted with the four Evangeliſts, there will appear a ſtriking difference with reſpect to the nature of their compoſitions, and the deſign

" no leſs ſtrength. Again, although the " Goſpels, both of Matthew and John, " could be ſuppoſed to be ſpurious, yet, if " the Goſpel of St. Luke was truly the " compoſition of that perſon, or of any " perſon, be his name what it might, who " was actually in the ſituation in which the " Author of that Goſpel profeſſes himſelf " to have been; or, if the Goſpel which " bears the name of Mark, really proceeded " from him, we ſtill, even upon the loweſt " ſuppoſition, poſſeſs the accounts of one " Writer at leaſt, who was not only con- " temporary with the Apoſtles, but aſſo- " ciated with them in their miniſtry; which " authority ſeems ſufficient, when the queſ- " tion is ſimply what it was which theſe " Apoſtles advanced."*

which they had in view. The learned and ingenious Dr. Thomas Townſon has obſerved, that things are mentioned by John, about which the other Evangeliſts are ſilent, and that, till towards the concluſion, he ſcarcely takes notice of any thing which they have related. The other Evangeliſts, on the contrary, are extremely ſimilar in their narrations, particularly in the great outline of the doctrine of *the coming of Chriſt*. This will perhaps, with the judicious Reader, be a ſufficient reaſon for paſſing over the Goſpel of St. John, eſpecially as there appears to be nothing peculiarly requiring attention in that Evangeliſt.

* See Paley's View, vol. i. p. 150.

Mr.

Mr. Volney, who, as hath before been obſerved, queſtions the very exiſtence of Jeſus Chriſt, with a like effrontery calls in queſtion the authenticity of the Chriſtian records. " It remains," ſays he, " to enquire " of what authority are theſe records !" He then quotes Fauſtus, whom he terms one of the moſt learned men of the third century, as ſaying—" All the world knows " that the Goſpels were neither written by " Jeſus Chriſt, nor his Apoſtles; but by " certain unknown perſons, who rightly " judging that they ſhould not obtain belief " reſpecting things which they had not " ſeen, placed at the head of their recitals " the names of contemporary Apoſtles !" But, if the authority of Fauſtus were of any value, in Mr. Volney's eſtimation, it might, one ſhould have ſuppoſed, have been ſufficient to convince him, both of the exiſtence of Jeſus and of his Apoſtles; for the affixing the names of men who had never exiſted, could not have given credit to their recitals ! With reſpect to the aſſertion of Fauſtus, it is contradicted by all antiquity; ſo far, at leaſt, as to prove that there did exiſt records of our Saviour's life in very early times, which were attributed

to the perſon or perſons whoſe names they now bear. See Lardner's Hiſtory of the Apoſtles and his Credibility. See alſo Dr. Paley and Mr. Evanſon, the latter of whom admits, in the fulleſt manner, that St. Luke's Goſpel was admitted by all antiquity, almoſt without an exception!

A third obſervation, to which the Reader's attention is requeſted, is, that it is of the utmoſt importance, in ſtudying the Evangeliſts, that they be conſidered *as Hiſtorians*, and that *the occaſion and connection* of the narration be cloſely and invariably attended to.

The advantages reſulting from this mode of ſtudying the Evangelical Hiſtory, it may fairly be preſumed, are ſufficiently evident, from what has been advanced in the preceding pages; in which, in moſt caſes, at leaſt, no room has been left for doubt of the true meaning of the Hiſtorian. But the advantages of viewing the Evangeliſts in this light, have, moſt certainly, not been ſufficiently attended to. The great Mr. Locke, with great good ſenſe, long ago obſerved, that "if the holy Scriptures were but "laid before the eyes of Chriſtians, in its "due connection and conſiſtency, it would

"not

" not then be ſo eaſy to ſnatch out a few
" words, as if they were ſeparate from the
" reſt, to ſerve a purpoſe to which they do
" not at all belong, and with which they
" have nothing to do. But," ſays he, " as
" the matter now ſtands, he that has a
" mind to it may, at a cheap rate, be a
" notable champion for the truth; that is,
" for the doctrines of the ſect that chance
" or intereſt has caſt him into. He need
" but be furniſhed with verſes of ſacred
" Scripture, containing words and expreſ-
" ſions that are but flexible, (as all general,
" obſcure, and doubtful ones are) and his
" ſyſtem that has appropriated them to the
" orthodoxy of his church, (of whatever
" denomination it may be) makes them
" immediately ſtrong and irrefragable ar-
" guments for his opinion. This is the
" benefit of looſe ſentences, and Scripture
" crumbled into verſes, which quickly turn
" into independent aphoriſms. But, if the
" quotation in the verſe produced, were
" conſidered as a part of a continued, co-
" herent diſcourſe, and ſo its ſenſe were
" limited by the tenor of the context, moſt
" of theſe formidable and warm Diſputants
" would be quite ſtripped of thoſe which

" they doubt not now to call ſpiritual " weapons, and they would often have " nothing to ſay, that would not ſhew their " weakneſs, and manifeſtly fly in their " faces."

And, to the ſame purpoſe, the truly learned and excellent Biſhop of Landaff ſays—" When men are deſirous of forming " ſyſtems, they are apt to collect together " a number of texts, which, being taken as " abſtract propoſitions, ſeem to eſtabliſh " the point, but which, when interpreted " by the context, appear to have no rela- " tion to it. There is no greater ſource of " error than this practice; it has prevailed " in the Chriſtian church from the earlieſt " ages, and it ſtill prevails. We owe to it " the corruptions of Popery, and that in- " finity of hereſies which have ſo much de- " baſed the ſimplicity of Goſpel truth, and " driven ſo many men of ſenſe from em- " bracing Chriſtianity. Every one who " will well weigh the ſubject, muſt perceive " the unfairneſs with which men uſually " proceed in forming ſyſtems in theology. " By ſtringing together detached ſentences, " an Auſonius may compel the chaſte " *Virgil* to furniſh materials for an in-

" decent

" decent poem; and from the Bible itſelf, " a ſyſtem of impiety might, by ſuch " means, be extracted." See Bp. Watſon's Charge, 1795, pp. 70-1.

It muſt appear to be utterly impoſſible to account for the numerous ſects and parties into which Chriſtians have been, and are ſtill divided, but from ſuch a mode of ſtudying *the New Teſtament*, and perhaps there has not been a greater ſtumbling block to the belief of Chriſtianity, than the numerous opinions which have been adopted concerning its nature. Tell us, ſay Unbelievers, what true Chriſtianity is, and then we may be able to form ſome judgment whether it is worthy of our reception; but while ſuch numerous and diſcordant views of it are given to us, we are utterly unable to judge which is the truth!

It is by no means intended to controvert Mr. Kett's poſition of *a ſecond coming* of the Meſſiah, or that the time of that coming is portended by the truly awful circumſtances of the preſent times! No doubt can poſſibly be entertained, by thoſe who are converſant in the Scriptures of the Old and New Teſtament, that times are ſpoken of as *yet to come*, when Chriſtianity will produce

duce much more beneficial effects on the happineſs of mankind than it has hitherto done—when, to uſe the figurative language of prophecy, *the mountains of the Lord's houſe ſhall be eſtabliſhed upon the top of the mountains, and ſhall be exalted above the hills, and all nations ſhall flow unto it*, and when *all the kingdoms of the earth ſhall become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Chriſt!* No perſon who ſeriouſly conſiders the paſt and the preſent ſtate of the Jewiſh nation, and the ſignal prophecies which are upon record, in the holy Scriptures, concerning this ſingular people, can heſitate in thinking that they are marked out by Providence as living monuments of the concern which God has with the affairs of men, and of the truth of prophecy. But the proofs of theſe important truths are ſufficiently numerous, without forcing into the ſervice paſſages which have no connection with theſe highly intereſting events.

Mr. Kett's quotation of Matt. xxiv. 29. 30. vol. iii. p. 253. cannot, perhaps, be reckoned of this number; becauſe, as has been obſerved, he conſiders *the ſecond coming of the Meſſiah*, as included in our Lord's prediction; nor yet thoſe of the 40th and

41ſt

41ſt verſe, which, in page 254, he quotes for the ſame purpoſe; though, if the view which has been given of that chapter, and particularly of theſe very verſes, be juſt, they certainly have no relation to thoſe times. But ſhould there remain any doubt as to the ſignification of theſe paſſages, there can be none of the declaration of Jeſus before the High Prieſt, which he quotes for the ſame purpoſe in page 268; for what connection can that declaration have with theſe times, viz. *that they* (the Jewiſh Rulers) *ſhould ſee the Son of Man ſitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.* The Evangeliſts Matthew and Luke ſeem particularly to have guarded againſt a miſapplication of this paſſage to any far diſtant period; for the former ſays απ' αρτι *from henceforth*, and the latter απο τουτου νυν *from the preſent time!* Beſides, *the coming in clouds*, both here and in the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew, moſt evidently means *the coming* to execute judgment, not *upon the Gentiles*, but *upon the Jews.* In neither view, therefore, do either of theſe paſſages appear to ſuit Mr. Kett's purpoſe, but rather contribute to injure, than to ſtrengthen the force of his

his argument, independent of the injury which is done to the Scripture, by applying paſſages to events with which they are in no reſpect connected!

The baneful conſequences of a miſapplication of the meaning of particular paſſages of Scripture, to which, however, all men are more or leſs liable, without any bad intention, are ſignally manifeſt in the preſent inſtance; for Dr. Prieſtley has expreſsly ſaid, page third of his Faſt Sermon, delivered February 28, 1794, that "the "miſtake which the Jews were under, "aroſe from their wholly overlooking the "ſuffering ſtate of the Meſſiah, and ima-"gining that his *firſt* coming would be "that mentioned by Daniel, *in the clouds of* "*heaven*, and conſequently that his king-"dom would commence on his firſt ap-"pearance." But, in anſwer to this, it may be obſerved, that if *his firſt coming* was not *in the clouds of heaven*, why did he mention it to the Jewiſh Rulers? Why did he declare, in the cloſeſt connection with *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, that *his coming* would be *in the clouds of heaven*? Why aſſert, even before the Jewiſh Rulers, at his trial, that his coming would be *in clouds*, and that from

from that very period ſuch *a coming* would be manifeſt, if his coming *in clouds* had no relation to them? The Jewiſh Rulers, moſt undoubtedly, thought very differently of that declaration; for, as was obſerved, when examining into the meaning of that paſſage, they diſcovered all the marks of rage, at the very thought of *the Meſſiah's coming* IN CLOUDS!

Dr. Prieſtley's aſſertion that the Jews were under a miſtake, when they imagined *his kingdom* would commence on his *firſt appearance*, is indeed ſo very extraordinary, that it muſt by no means be paſſed over, as the moſt ſerious conſequences to Chriſtianity are involved in it; for if *the kingdom of Chriſt*, or of *the Meſſiah*, did not then commence, what is to be thought of Jeſus's declaration that *the kingdom of heaven* was *at hand*; or, of his aſſertion afterwards, that there were ſome with whom he was then converſing *who ſhould ſee the kingdom of God come with power?* When Dr. Prieſtley intimates, page fourth, that this was not *a proper kingdom*, he could not ſurely have been aware of the conſequences of ſuch a diſtinction! He could not mean, by this remark, to inſinuate that Jeſus uſed a lan-

guage

guage that was *improper!* for Jeſus called it by the name of *a kingdom*, and aſſerted that it was to commence *in that generation*; and for Dr. Prieſtley to intimate that this was not *a proper kingdom*, is, indeed, to uſe a language that is, in the higheſt degree, unwarrantable!

Whatever improvements, or to whatever extent, may hereafter be made in the adminiſtration of this kingdom, or in its effects upon mankind; it is evident they muſt, if Chriſtianity be true, be of the ſame nature, as *a kingdom of righteouſneſs*, with that which was originally eſtabliſhed by our Lord, and the only difference that can be ſuppoſed to take place at any future period, will probably be in the different and more extenſive influence which it will then have upon the hearts and lives of men; when, as the Prophet ſpeaks, *the people ſhall be all righteous*, and conſequently the neceſſity of human laws and of human governments will then be ſuperceded. But whether *a ſecond coming* of Chriſt will take place—what commotions and calamities will precede this happy and moſt deſirable change—or whether the awful events which are now paſſing in the world have any immediate relation to it—are con-

conſiderations which muſt be left to thoſe who are converſant in *the deep things of God*, to enquire into—or perhaps to events themſelves to unfold!

A ſtate of things which ſhall ſupercede the neceſſity of human laws, and of human governments, conſidering the preſent ſituation of the world, muſt, to many, appear altogether improbable, and in vain to be expected! But if Chriſtianity hath had the beſt effects upon individuals, no juſt reaſon can be aſſigned why its influence may not be extended and increaſed, and why even whole communities may not be ſenſible of that influence; why, in ſhort, in ſome future period, it may not have all that influence which the holy Scriptures have, in ſuch ſtrong language, taught mankind to expect from it. Chriſtianity, moſt certainly, has had different effects upon different nations, and upon different bodies of men, according as it has been more * or leſs

* In one country the lower ranks in ſociety are ſober, induſtrious, and intelligent, in conſequence of a better ſyſtem of education than can be found at preſent to prevail in another, where the ſame deſcription of people cannot be compared with them without forming concluſions much to their diſadvantage. Were ſeminaries of education, upon a well digeſted plan, eſtabliſhed in every town and village, no one can doubt that they would have a wonderful influence in forming

leſs perfectly underſtood; and no one who is capable of taking the moſt curſory view of the preſent ſtate of the world, can entertain a doubt that, in moſt countries of the world, it is very imperfectly underſtood, and therefore no one can wonder that its influence ſhould have been ſo imperfect. But however imperfect the influence of Chriſtianity may have been, it deſerves to be conſidered what the effect of the rejection of it would be? "He who removes," ſaith the Biſhop of Landaff, "from the mind of man the hopes and "fears of futurity, opens the flood-gates of "immorality, and lets in a deluge of vice "and crimes deſtructive alike of the dignity "of human nature, and of the tranquillity "of the world." "Unhappy will it be for "a nation," ſays the celebrated Author of "the Travels of Anacharſis, "when light "converſations (concerning Religion) be-"come general among the induſtrious

forming the manners of men. To the Politician and to the Divine, who are concerned for the true intereſts of mankind, this muſt be an object of the greateſt magnitude and importance, to which, in times like theſe eſpecially, every other conſideration ſhould be ſubſervient. A Tax impoſed upon the community for the ſole purpoſe of *Education*, would return to thoſe upon whom it was levied an hundred-fold into their boſoms, in the promotion of the happineſs of themſelves and their poſterity.

claſſes

" claſſes of the people, who are but too
" much expoſed to their influence, by the
" ſufferings of their condition, the faults
" of their education, and the influence of
" example. Will they be kept, by the mere
" terrors of juſtice, within the bounds that
" order in ſociety preſcribes? Who will
" think himſelf ſecure in the midſt of do-
" meſtics, each of whom have an intereſt
" in ſeizing on his property, and perhaps
" in taking away his life, when they have
" nothing farther to do than to contrive
" the means of impunity? The laws of man
" hold back the hand from wrongs; thoſe
" of Religion reſtrain the heart. Have we
" reaſon to expect that the former are
" ſufficient, of themſelves, to inſpire the
" love of virtue, when, aided by the latter,
" they ſcarcely produce that effect?"

Theſe obſervations of this enlightened Stateſman * have been moſt awfully verified by

* " To diſturb the order of ſociety," ſays the ſame excellent Author, " is not the only effect of indecent declamations " againſt Religion; they taint with deſpair the minds of " the unfortunate. No country or condition is without " virtuous people, who weep in ſecret, from the outrages " of fortune—the injuſtice of the wicked—or the natural " evils of life. And who is he that would tear from them " the only conſolation that remains? that of believing that " all is conducted by the hand of God, who ſees their

by his own countrymen, who have ſince openly rejected Chriſtianity as an impoſture, and by whoſe depravity he himſelf became a victim to thoſe very calamities which he has here ſo well deſcribed! What more powerful ſtimulus can be offered to the human mind, to the exertion of the friends of Chriſtianity, to endeavor to remove the difficulties with which, from various cauſes, it may have been clogged, and to exhibit it to the eyes of mankind in all its genuine ſimplicity! And what method more natural or more effectual can be deviſed, than the ſtudy-

" tears—is full of compaſſion for them—and has in ſtore for " them, bleſſings to compenſate for all their ſufferings. If " our ſyſtem be an illuſion, it is a thouſand times to be " preferred to the fatal knowledge Infidels would give us " in lieu of its delights."

" Infidels of every condition loudly vaunt their virtue, " but it is not of a kind to be ſcrupulouſly examined. What " ſolidity is there in the virtue that proclaims implacable " hatred to a Religion which inculcates, inſpires, recom- " penſes nothing but virtue? and which, founding all pro- " bity upon human principles, invites us to conſider even " thoſe principles as no more than the prejudice of educa- " tion? This is an awful problem for Infidels to ſolve!"

" If Religion were no more than the work of men's hands, " he who firſt conceived the idea of opening an intercourſe " of affection between an Infinite Being and feeble man, " formed the moſt beneficent of projects!"

" The Chriſtian Religion, detached from extraneous " things with which men have confounded it, is the pureſt " ſyſtem of morals, and the beſt ſource of happineſs; it " enriches

ſtudying the Evangeliſts *as Hiſtorians!* Until they are ſo ſtudied, it will be in vain to expect that ſolid ſatisfaction from them which they ſeem, in this view of them, ſo well calculated to produce—or to ſay, with any certainty, what Chriſtianity is!

When the Evangeliſts choſe the hiſtoric form, no doubt can poſſibly be entertained that they conſidered it as preferable to any other, to communicate to mankind the great and important truths which it contains; and why that form ſhould have been ſo little attended to by Chriſtians of all

" enriches the mind with all virtue; it enlarges the circle " of virtues; it expands the ſoul, filling it with ſweet and " laſting peace; that peace which the world cannot give " nor take away, and which makes us at peace with our- " ſelves and the whole human race."

To this invaluable extract may very properly be added the obſervation of the Biſhop of Landaff, that " there never " yet hath exiſted, and there never can exiſt, a nation with- " out Religion. If Chriſtianity be aboliſhed, Paganiſm, " Mahometaniſm, ſome religious impoſture or other muſt " be introduced in its ſtead, or civil ſociety muſt be given " up. But, in the opinion of *Bacon*, (a Philoſopher with " whom our modern Philoſophers cannot be compared) " 'there hath not, in any age, been diſcovered any philo- " ſophy, opinion, religion, law, or diſcipline, which ſo " greatly exalts the common, and leſſens individual intereſt, " as the Chriſtian Religion doth;' ſo that I know not " which moſt to admire and deplore, their wickedneſs as " men, or their weakneſs as ſtateſmen, who have attempted " to govern mankind without Religion, and to eſtabliſh " ſociety on the ruins of Chriſtianity."

denominations, will probably be a matter of aſtoniſhment to future ages; as the neglect of it has, inconteſtibly, been the ſource of innumerable opinions, which otherwiſe could never have exiſted.

Had the celebrated Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, for inſtance, viewed the Chriſtian inſtitution in this light, he never could have aſſerted, that thoſe who underſtood, in their literal ſenſe, the diſcourſes of Chriſt himſelf, were obliged to expect the ſecond and glorious coming of the Son of Man in the clouds, before that generation was totally extinguiſhed which had beheld his humble condition upon earth—or, that the records of ſeventeen centuries have inſtructed us not to preſs too cloſely the language of prophecy and revelation. The moſt ſuperficial view of Chriſtianity, conſidered as *an Hiſtory*, would immediately have led him to perceive that it was not *a ſecond coming*, but *his coming* as *the Meſſiah*, to which alone the language which Jeſus adopted, can poſſibly be applied, without perverting the whole tenor of the Goſpel Hiſtory, and that therefore the cloſer the language of prophecy and revelation is preſſed, the more it will re-

redound to the honor of him who made uſe of it. It would have been manifeſt to a demonſtration, that when Jeſus aſſerted he ſhould come *in clouds*, he could only mean to oppoſe the expectation which the Jews had ſo conſtantly entertained, that *his coming* would be with all the ſplendor and glory of a Conqueror!

If there are any whoſe religious opinions have unhappily been influenced to the prejudice of Chriſtianity, by theſe aſſertions of the learned Hiſtorian, and conſidered as incontrovertible by the learned Univerſity Preacher, they are moſt earneſtly entreated to give the cloſeſt attention to the preceding examination of the ſubject. If there is any juſt foundation for ſuch a charge, as it relates to the Author of our Religion, let Chriſtianity be anſwerable for it—let it be rejected as unworthy of the reception of rational beings! But if, on the contrary, the reaſoning which has been adopted in the preceding pages ſhall, in the main, be found to be juſt and accurate, let it have its due influence in giving correcter ideas of this important ſubject, and in increaſing the veneration of mankind for the character of Jeſus, and their eſteem for the

Religion which he came to eſtabliſh: and particularly let it be a ſtrong inducement to all future Enquirers into the nature and merits of Chriſtianity, to ſtudy it as *an Hiſtory*, ſince ſuch a mode of ſtudying it has afforded ſo ſatisfactory a reply to one of the moſt formidable objections which has ever been brought againſt it, and ſince it may, without aſſuming too much, be affirmed, that it never could have been anſwered, in a ſatisfactory manner, in any other way.

Another obſervation, ariſing from the view which has been given of the ſubject of *the coming of Chriſt*, as delineated by the Evangeliſts, is, that it will probably lay a firm foundation for the right underſtanding of the language of the Epiſtles, ſo extremely ſimilar to that of our Lord. This language has likewiſe been the ſource of the greateſt perplexity to the moſt careful Enquirers into the meaning of theſe Epiſtles; but nothing ſatisfactory has hitherto been advanced to account for it. It hath indeed been ſaid, and very truly, that the Writers of theſe Epiſtles have aſſerted ſuch things as are totally incompatible with the ſuppoſition that *the end of the world was at hand!* But the Biſhop of Lan-

Landaff, after having produced ſeveral inſtances of this kind, much to the purpoſe, does not appear extremely ſolicitous to relieve the Apoſtles from the accuſation of error; for he ſays, addreſſing himſelf to Mr. Gibbon—" If, notwithſtanding what " hath been ſaid, you ſhould ſtill be of " opinion that the Apoſtles expected Chriſt " would come in their time, it will not " follow that this their error ought, in any " wiſe, to diminiſh their authority as " Preachers of the Goſpel. It can be no " impeachment, either of their integrity as " Men, or their ability as Hiſtorians, or " their honeſty as Preachers of the Goſpel, " that they were unacquainted with what " had never been revealed to them; that " they followed their own underſtandings " where they had no better light to guide " them; ſpeaking from conjecture when " they could not ſpeak from certainty; of " themſelves when they had no command- " ment of the Lord. They knew but in part, " and they propheſied but in part; and con- " cerning this particular point, Jeſus him- " ſelf had told them, juſt as he was about " finally to leave them, that it was not for " them to *know the times and the ſeaſons, which*

" *the Father had put in his own power.*" The Biſhop adds—" Nor is it to be wondered " at, that the Apoſtles were left in a ſtate " of uncertainty concerning the time in " which Chriſt ſhould appear, ſince Beings " far more exalted, and more highly fa- " voured of heaven than they, were under " an equal degree of ignorance: *Of that* " *day*, ſays our Saviour, *and of that hour* " *knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are* " *in heaven; neither the Son, but the Father* " *only.*" Watſon's Apol. p. 60, &c.

But how will this reaſoning apply to the Apoſtles, in their uſe of the language in queſtion? Had the Apoſtles contented themſelves with being ſilent upon a ſubject about which they had no commandment—had they followed their own underſtandings where they had no better light to guide them—or had they even ſpoken from conjecture, when they could not ſpeak from certainty—nothing could have been more to the purpoſe than what the Biſhop has here advanced in their favor! But unfortunately for the Biſhop's reaſoning, the Apoſtles aſſerted, in very ſtrong terms, and that without the moſt diſtant idea of doubt that *the Lord was at hand*, and that *the coming*

of

of the Lord was drawing nigh. Indeed no language could have been more peremptory and deciſive than that which the Apoſtles have made uſe of upon the ſubject! The authority of the Apoſtles, therefore, is as materially concerned in this matter, *as Preachers of the Goſpel*, as that of our Lord himſelf.

How then, it will naturally be aſked, are the Apoſtles to be vindicated in the uſe of this language? This queſtion is of an importance perhaps little inferior to that which hath been diſcuſſed in the preceding pages, and conſequently deſerves as minute an inveſtigation; but this would far exceed the limits of the preſent volume. Suffice it at preſent to ſay, that a ſatisfactory anſwer to this queſtion would in vain be ſought for, but in the language of our Lord, and in the events which, in the courſe of his miniſtry, he had occaſion to unfold to his Diſciples, and particularly in that event which makes ſo conſpicuous a figure in the Goſpel Hiſtory, and which yet remained to be accompliſhed, viz. *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem.* With this event, it is abundantly evident our Lord all along connected *his coming*; and it appears, with a ſin-

a ſingular propriety, to have been adopted by the Apoſtles as a more delicate and covert way of ſpeaking upon ſo diſagreeable a ſubject as *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*. To have ſpoken openly, and without reſerve, of that awful cataſtrophe, every one muſt perceive, would have been extremely hazardous, and have expoſed them to greater perſecutions than even thoſe which, on other accounts, they were then ſuffering under, particularly from the Jews, whoſe power and influence were by no means inconſiderable, even out of Judea. Such a language had been rendered familiar to them by the uſe which their Divine Maſter had made of it; and as it was a leſs dangerous mode of ſpeaking upon the ſubject, and was probably perfectly underſtood by the Chriſtians of thoſe times, it was natural for them to avail themſelves of it, as a term which was leſs capable of giving offence to their enemies. In this view no language could have been more happily fitted for the purpoſe, and it ſeems difficult to imagine how the Apoſtles could have avoided availing themſelves of it, eſpecially at a period when the approaching accompliſhment of our Lord's prediction of *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, muſt

muſt neceſſarily have engroſſed much of their thoughts, both in their converſations and in their writings.

It ſeems to have been generally allowed, by thoſe who have turned their attention to *the time* when the Epiſtles were written, that moſt of them were compoſed *prior* to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, and nothing can be more evident, than that the troubles and perſecutions which the early Chriſtians experienced, aroſe *principally* from the Jewiſh nation. As the late Dr. Horne has obſerved, "the mention of heaven's mercy being "extended to the Gentiles, always put "them beſide themſelves. Chriſt only "hinted the caſe of Elijah healing Naaman "the Syrian, and that of Eliſha being ſent "to a widow of Sarepta, leaving the ap-"plication to themſelves. They underſtood "him, and endeavoured inſtantly to deſtroy "him. St. Paul, relating the ſtory of his "converſion, was patiently heard, till he "touched upon the circumſtance of his "miſſion to the Gentiles. *They gave him* "*audience* to this word, and then lifted up "their voices and ſaid, Away with ſuch a "fellow from the earth, for it is not fit "that he ſhould live."

But

But if they were offended at the extenſion of the divine favor to the Gentile world, they were ſtill more ſo, at the terms upon which they were to receive it. The Jews conceived that their law was of perpetual obligation, and they had not the moſt diſtant idea, that if the Gentiles were to be admitted to partake of the privileges of the Meſſiah's kingdom, it could be upon any other conditions than a ſtrict obſervance of all the rites of the Jewiſh law, and particularly of circumciſion, the diſtinguiſhing badge of *a Jew*.

The Hiſtory of the Acts of the Apoſtles affords ample evidence that theſe were the chief cauſes, and the principal ſources of the violent oppoſition which the Apoſtles met with in propagating Chriſtianity, not only in Judea, but in almoſt every country where it was preached. With a view to this oppoſition the Apoſtle Paul characterizes them as *the common enemies of mankind*—as *filling up the meaſure of their iniquities*, and as perſons on whom *wrath was actually coming to the uttermoſt*.

As it is not probable that the Jews ever ceaſed perſecuting the Gentiles, till Jeruſalem was deſtroyed, nothing could tend ſo effec-

effectually to ſilence, or at leaſt to ſoften the oppoſition which they met with from them, as the completion of this awful event. But in what terms could the Apoſtles converſe or write, upon this very delicate and affecting ſubject, ſo natural as thoſe which their Lord had previouſly adopted in his prediction of it. Such a language muſt have been leſs offenſive, and have expoſed them to much leſs hazard than any direct and explicit expreſſions upon the ſubject. And that they actually did make uſe of this language, and apply it to that awful event, ſeems highly probable from that gradation in their expreſſions, which is obſervable in the Epiſtles, according to the order of time in which they appear to have been written. In the Epiſtle to the Philippians, which is ſuppoſed to have been written about the year ſixty-two, St. Paul ſays that it was *at hand*. In that to the Hebrews, which was written at a ſtill later period, the Writer's language is—*the day is approaching*—and *yet a little while and he that ſhall come will come, and will not tarry*. And St. John, in his firſt Epiſtle, intimates that it was ſtill nearer. ch. ii. *Little children, it is the laſt time*; and what is particularly worthy of obſer-

obſervation, he adds—*as ye have heard that Antichriſt ſhall come, even now are there many Antichriſts, whereby we know that it is the laſt time.* Biſhop Hurd, in his Introduction to the Study of the Prophecies, ſays—" it is eaſy " to give a juſt expoſition" of this paſſage. " *Little children, it is the laſt time*, or *hour*— " that is, the deſtruction of Jeruſalem is at " hand; as indeed it followed very ſoon " after the date of this Epiſtle." And, a little farther on, he ſays—" the appearance " of *falſe Chriſts* and *falſe Prophets* (of which " there were many, according to our Lord's " prediction, in St. John's time) indicated " the arrival of that *hour* that was to be " fatal to the Jewiſh ſtate." vol. ii. pp. 8-9.

Biſhop Hurd, it is true, ſays—" that the " appearance of *falſe Chriſts* and *falſe Pro-* " *phets* were, at the ſame time, types and " fore-runners of a ſtill more dreadful " power, which ſhould be fully revealed in " *the latter times*, in a future period, when " that calamity was paſt—that the Apoſtle " appeals to a tradition then current among " the Diſciples, that ſuch a power ſhould " ariſe in the Chriſtian church, and that " his hated name of *Antichriſt* is applied, " in this paſſage, by way of anticipation to

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" the falſe Prophets of that time, as poſ-
" ſeſſing much of his character, and acting
" with his ſpirit." But whatever foundation there may be for ſuch an opinion, in other parts of the Apoſtolic Writings, it appears to have no countenance in this Epiſtle of St. John; for the only tradition to which the Apoſtle here appeals, ſeems to be that which was handed down from our Lord to the Chriſtians to whom St. John wrote; for ſo the Apoſtle himſelf explains it: *And now*, ſays he, *there are many Antichriſts, whereby ye know that it is the laſt time*, viz. the time when *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem* was *at hand*. This is abundantly evident from the very next verſe—*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifeſt that they were not all of us.* So again, v. 22. *Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jeſus is the Chriſt*, or *the Meſſiah*; and, in the twenty-ſixth verſe, he ſays—*Theſe things have I written concerning them that ſeduce you.* In the fourth chapter, v. 1. the Apoſtle renews the ſame ſubject. *Beloved, believe not every ſpirit, but try the ſpirits whether they are of God*; and the reaſon which the Apoſtle gives

gives for this trial, he ſays, is—*becauſe many falſe Prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the ſpirit of God: Every ſpirit that confeſſeth that Jeſus Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah, *is come in the fleſh, is of God. And every ſpirit that confeſſeth not that Jeſus Chriſt is come in the fleſh, is not of God. And this is that ſpirit of Antichriſt whereof ye have heard that it ſhould come, and even now already is in the world.* If any doubt could ariſe concerning the Apoſtle's meaning here; the fifteenth verſe will fully remove it. *Whoſoever ſhall confeſs that Jeſus is the Son of God*, the Meſſiah, *God dwelleth in him and he in God.* But, beſides this, there is farther very ſtriking evidence of the meaning of the Apoſtle, John, v. 4. *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome*, or triumphed over *them*, to wit, *the Seducers* mentioned ch. ii. 26. who would have perſuaded them that *Jeſus Chriſt*, or *the Meſſiah*, was not come, *becauſe*, ſays the Apoſtle, *greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* He then deſcribes the character of theſe *falſe Chriſts* and *falſe Prophets* nearly in the very ſame language which the Jews, who expected a temporal Meſſiah, then indiſputably held. *They are of the world*—they are looking for a temporal Meſſiah

Meſſiah—*therefore ſpeak they of the world*—they promiſe you great worldly proſperity, *and*, on that account, *the world heareth them*. How extremely to the purpoſe is all this, if the Apoſtle is here deſcribing what they had heard from their beloved Lord, that there would be *falſe Chriſts* and *falſe Prophets*, who ſhould ariſe prior to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem?* And how ſtrongly does it confirm the idea that the Apoſtles, when they ſpoke of *the coming of the Lord drawing nigh*, borrowed their language from him, to deſcribe *the* approaching *deſtruction of Jeruſalem?* And if ſo, theſe may juſtly be conſidered as ſo many genuine, internal evidences of the authenticity of the Epiſtle!*

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* When Biſhop Hurd ſays that the Apoſtle John appeals to a tradition then current among the Diſciples, that ſuch a power as he refers to was to ariſe in the Chriſtian church, in a future period, there ſeems not to be the ſmalleſt evidence of the exiſtence of ſuch a tradition, except the expreſſion of the Apoſtle—*Ye have heard*, which applies infinitely more naturally to our Lord's prediction of *the coming of falſe Chriſts and falſe Prophets*, previous to *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, than to the apoſtacy of the Chriſtian church, in ages that were far diſtant.

With reſpect to the term *Antichriſt*, it deſerves to be remarked, that it is not to be found in the ſecond chapter of the ſecond Epiſtle to the Theſſalonians, which is ſo generally ſuppoſed to relate to the enormous corruptions of the church of Rome; nor is the word *Antichriſt* once mentioned throughout the whole of the Revelations, where, if any where, it

In like manner the Apoſtle Paul, in the firſt Epiſtle to the Theſſalonians, ch. v. 2. tells them that *the day of the Lord* was coming *as a thief in the night*, and they were

might moſt naturally have been expected to be found, if it had any relation to the church of Rome. In fact it occurs only four times in the whole of the New Teſtament, viz. in the firſt and ſecond Epiſtles of John, in all which places there is the ſtrongeſt reaſon for believing that the opinion of Grotius is perfectly accurate, when he ſays Sicut *Anti-cæſarem* dicimus, qui contra Cæſarem ſe Cæſarem vult dici atque Cæſar haberi, ſic *Antichriſtus* eſt qui ſe vero Chriſto opponit *eo modo* ut ipſe Chriſtus haberi velit." Op. iv. p. 490. Two out of the four paſſages, where the word *Antichriſt* occurs, have already been laid before the Reader. A third is, 1 John, ii 22. *Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jeſus is the Chriſt*, or *the Meſſiah. He is Antichriſt that denieth the Father and the Son:* Not denying, ſays Dr. Benſon, that there was a God, nor that the maker of the world, and the God of Iſrael, was the one true God; but denying him a due regard, in not acknowledging *Jeſus to be the Meſſiah*, after the many and clear evidences which God had given of that truth: juſt as he who deſpiſed the Apoſtles deſpiſed both *Chriſt* and God who had ſent them. See Benſon in loco. The other place where this word is uſed is in the ſecond Epiſtle of John, verſe the ſeventh. *Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confeſs not that Jeſus Chriſt*, or the Meſſiah, *is come in the fleſh. This is a Deceiver and an Antichriſt.*

If the obſervation of Mr. Kett, vol. ii. p. 2. be juſt, that the particular meaning of the word *Antichriſt* is to be collected from thoſe paſſages of Scripture in which it occurs, there can be no reaſonable doubt that St. John refers to thoſe perſons who denied that Jeſus was *the Meſſiah*, without any reference to the corruptions of the church of Rome, though thoſe corruptions may certainly well enough be termed *Antichriſtian*, in the ſenſe of their being directly contrary to the nature and the ſpirit of Chriſtianity!

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particularly directed *to watch* for it, and for this reaſon eſpecially, becauſe it would ſo come. *But*, adds the Apoſtle, *ye are not in darkneſs that that day ſhould come upon you unawares*; *i. e.* you have been told of the ſigns of its approach, and a ſtate of watchfulneſs will preſerve you againſt ſurprize!

This chapter, it muſt be acknowledged, has generally been applied to an event very different from *the deſtruction of Jeruſalem*, viz. to the final judgement of the world. But it muſt not be overlooked, that the Jews were, in this very Epiſtle, the object of the ſevereſt cenſure of the Apoſtle—*They both killed the Lord Jeſus and their own Prophets, and have perſecuted us, and they pleaſe not God, and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to ſpeak to the Gentiles that they might be ſaved.* Nor is it a little remarkable, that Dr. Benſon, Dr. Macknight, and indeed almoſt all the Commentators are ſo ſtruck with the ſimilarity of the Apoſtle's language in this fifth chapter, to that of our Lord in the twenty-fourth of Matthew, that they uniformly refer to it, though they generally think the day of judgment is *excluſively* the ſubject of the Apoſtle's diſcourſe; and Dr.

Benſon particularly refers to, Matt. xxiv. 46. *Of that day and hour knoweth no man.* If Scripture is to be its own interpreter, what better commentary of this chapter can the judicious Reader have, than that which the twenty-fourth of Matthew, and the parallel chapters, afford? Beſides, how could it be ſaid that the Theſſalonians *were not in darkneſs*; *that the day* of judgment *ſhould overtake them as a thief*; for, as Biſhop Newton obſerves—if we conſult reaſon, if we conſult revelation, about the time when the general judgment ſhall come, neither of them afford us any light: both of them leave us in darkneſs. He might, with equal propriety, have added, that there is no where in Scripture any account of ſigns which were to precede the day of judgment, nor any tokens of its approach. The beſt authority has, indeed, ſaid that ſuch a day will come, and that there will be a general reſurrection, both of the juſt and unjuſt. But this ſeems to be all that is neceſſary or proper for us, for obvious reaſons, to know. Nor can there be any good reaſon aſſigned, why a revelation of this matter ſhould have been made to the Theſſalonians, which would not

not concern Chriſtians of every age, and more eſpecially thoſe who ſhould live the neareſt to it.*

If this reaſoning is of any weight, it will tend greatly to confirm the leading purpoſe of this obſervation, that the Apoſtles adopted the language of our Lord, in order, with the greater ſecurity, both in writing and converſation, to point out *the approaching deſtruction of Jeruſalem!* and if ſo, a complete ſolution of the difficulty, ariſing from the uſe of the language of the Apoſtles, and a full vindication of them from the charge of the Hiſtorian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, of having predicted the end of the world in their own age, will probably be afforded. But this, it muſt be owned, will beſt appear by a cloſe attention to the ſeveral paſſages in their connection which relate to this ſubject. Should this work meet with ſufficient encouragement, this ſubject will afford ample matter for another volume;

* Theſe remarks are chiefly taken from a work entitled *An Illuſtration of various important Paſſages in the Epiſtles*, publiſhed by the Author, where the deſign of the two Epiſtles to the Theſſalonians is largely inveſtigated; which a lapſe of ten years has contributed to ſtrengthen and confirm, by many other weighty and important conſiderations.

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but, as a greater riſque, conſidering the declining ſtate of Religion in the world, and the Author's ſituation in life, is run, in the preſent publication, than prudence perhaps would have dictated, he muſt wait the public deciſion, which will influence his future conduct.

With one obſervation more this work ſhall conclude; but it is an obſervation in which more than one nation ſeems to be deeply intereſted! *The deſtruction of Jeruſalem* was the effect of a moſt deplorable corruption of manners, and of a ſupine indifference to the means of improvement which were offered to them, ariſing from an unbounded ambition, which had taken the deepeſt root in their minds. Ideas of aggrandizement, and of univerſal empire, had entirely engroſſed their thoughts, at the moment when deſolation and ruin were advancing with haſty ſteps. Nor were frequent warnings of their approaching calamities wanting. *Oh Jeruſalem! Jeruſalem! thou that killeſt the Prophets, and ſtoneſt them that are ſent unto thee—how often would I have gathered thy children, as an hen gathereth her chicken under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your houſe is left unto you deſolate.*

The

The preſent criſis is an alarming one! The judgments of God are abroad in the earth. All the inhabitants of the earth are trembling with apprehenſion, and imagination is upon the ſtretch as to the probable iſſue of things! The French nation, like the Jews of old, have graſped at Univerſal Empire! Like them, promiſing themſelves *liberty*, they have become ſlaves, and, by the like unſubſtantial promiſes, have enſlaved many of the ſurrounding nations. By uſing it as a cloak for the moſt unbounded licentiouſneſs, they have rendered even the name of Liberty an object of ſuſpicion, which has had a moſt deadly influence upon every ſpecies of reform; which, if not checked, muſt be productive of the moſt malignant effects upon the happineſs of mankind, if it doth not involve them in one general ruin.

Britain hath, happily, under Providence, been the chief inſtrument in reſtraining the exorbitant ambition which was ready to draw every thing within its vortex. May it likewiſe be the happy inſtrument of reſtraining the rapid progreſs of Infidelity, by promoting the knowledge and practice of genuine Chriſtianity! If the preceding enquiry ſhall, in any wiſe, contribute to remove ob-

objections to it, and to preſent it, under a more favourable light, to the notice of mankind—if it ſhall ſerve as a model for future enquiry, and lead to a more general and cordial reception of it—if, in ſhort, it in any way ſhall anſwer the great purpoſe of all Religion, to reform and amend mankind,* and thus to ward off calamity, it will be ſome recompence, under uncommon infirmity and perſonal affliction, for the trouble of compoſing it.

* Le deſſein de Dieu eſt plus de perfectionner la volonté que l'eſprit. Paſcal.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

FINIS.

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